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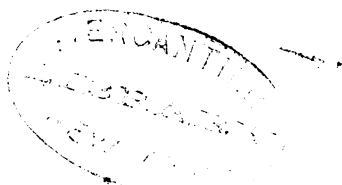
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A STORY OF ROMAN CARTHAGE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"CHRONICLES OF THE SCHÖNBERG-COTTA FAMILY."

[Charles, Elizabeth (Bundle)]

1828-1896.

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LAPSED, BUT NOT LOST.

CHAPTER I.

THE last rays of the sun, flame to the last, were burning on the rich and populous shores of the Bay of Carthage, touching to a fiery point the white temples which crowned the low heights, glowing along the upland corn-fields, which were the granary of Rome, capriciously distinguishing here and there the red stem of a pine on the slopes, or the sail of one or another of the countless merchant ships which crowded the harbour.

The hum of the great city—great even in this its later Roman flood-tide, yet not reaching to the brim of its ancient Punic glory—rose to the point above the sea where the young maiden, Viola, was sitting, watching, under the shadow of a group of cypresses, the path among the vines and olives which led up from the city two or three miles away.

No sound of vesper bells came to her; the Christian Church, which was noiselessly pursuing her path of conquest, and even venturing in some places to greet the eye with sacred buildings of some stateliness, did not venture to appeal to the ear, and had not, indeed, yet found her own voice, in the music of church bells. And the call of the Arabian prophet to prayer was not yet to be heard for four centuries. The level of secular sound was pierced by no call to prayer, and the level of the city roofs was broken by no aspiring spire or minaret.

The cry of the sailors weighing anchor, the song of the day labourer returning from his work, the chant of the solitary boatman as he rounded the point on which she sate, the far-off hum of the busy swarms of Carthage, were all the sounds that reached her. The hum was louder than usual, and there was anxiety in the watching eyes. It had been a great festival-day at Carthage and throughout the empire.

Rome that day was keeping her thousandth birthday—Rome, who had made the whole world so

marvellously one, unaware as yet how, in infusing herself into the world, she had lost her own identity; how, in enforcing this external unity, she had melted down the very bone and sinew of the nations, and reduced them to a gelatinous mass, which when once the mould of her strong institutions was broken by the new races of the north, would cease to have any coherence, so that men would wonder blindly what had caused this marvellous unity to seem to be.

The secular games were that day beginning, in every city throughout the empire, to celebrate the foundation of the city, the city of Romulus, the city of Brutus, of Cæsar, of Cicero, the city of Scipio the conqueror of Punic Carthage; the city whose name ruled the world, but which nevertheless had herself been ruled for thirty years by none of Roman origin, but by a dissolute Syrian, who desecrated her most sacred shrines, by another Syrian who held all races and religions equal, by a barbarous Thracian, and an Arabian.

Yet most obviously one Power, called Rome, still reigned, made roads, and kept them safe from

Bordeaux to Phrygia, imposed taxes and had them paid, whoever was ruined and whoever was enriched by them; and now this day celebrated its own mythical thousandth birthday in the Coliseum of conquered Carthage, in the Amphitheatres at Smyrna, at Trèves, at Richborough—celebrated it by setting men and beasts to tear each other to pieces in the arena.

The maiden Viola sat and watched, anxiously trying to disentangle and interpret the various dim sounds that reached her, until the tones of a clear tenor voice rang along the upland path, and the watching face broke into a radiance of welcome as she gathered her veil around her and hastened a few steps down the slope to meet the brother she was waiting for.

“Valerian, you are late,” she said. “There have been sounds as of a tumult in the city, and I know these great festivals are said to be perilous to us, and I was afraid something evil was happening. But they died away half an hour since.”

“There has been a great celebration in the Amphitheatre,” he said, “and there were some famous

athletes from Rome, and fresh lions just brought from Numidia. The contest was keen, they say, and all the city went to see it."

"All the city, Valerian!" she said, veiling her eyes with a shudder. "Surely none of *us*—none of ours?"

"I cannot say none," he replied. "You see families are mixed in these days, and a Christian wife may have to purchase from a heathen husband her freedom to attend our mysteries and visit our sick by accompanying him to the theatres. It is not all so simple as you think, little sister, here in our quiet farm."

"But the Amphitheatre!" she said. "That arena where the wild beasts have rent and torn our very own—the disciples of our Christ—our own sweet martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas, whose birthdays we celebrate to-morrow in the catacombs. Surely none of us would be found there?"

"None like thee, beloved," he said, fondly touching the long dark hair which escaped from the fillet. "To thee Vivia Perpetua and Felicitas are like thine own sisters, fresh in perpetual youth."

"As they *are*, Valerian," she said softly.

"As they are," he replied. "But to many, even of us, it seems as an old tale, and the half-century which separates us from them seems a gulf which cannot be passed. The heathen have grown gentler, they say, since then. The faith has penetrated with its tender light many a home which does not know its source. It is more than thirty years since there has been anything worthy to be called a persecution."

"Still," she said, "there is the arena, and the savage wild beasts rend men there to amuse more savage men and women. And our grandmother said this morning, who knows when the old rage may burst out again?"

The young man smiled with a little gentle scorn. "Grandmothers naturally see perils in every twilight shadow," he said.

"But our grandmother remembers seeing Perpetua and Felicitas and the rest martyred," she replied. "It was that which made her a Christian, and she says it is a great crime for any Christian to visit the gladiatorial shows."

"If we had seen such horrors we might probably dread their renewal as she does," he said, "and judge severely those who frequent them."

"But the Church forbids. Tertullian used the strongest denunciations, our own Tertullian, who you say has such eloquence and zeal."

"Tertullian was a great man, but he was an austere man," was the reply, "and he was a Montanist, and is scarcely to be followed in all things."

"Valerian! brother!" she exclaimed; "you are not defending—most surely you would never attend the games?"

He was leaning against the stem of a stone pine as she spoke, his dark eyes ranging dreamily over the city and the bay.

But at her question he seemed to arouse himself from a dream, and looking down into her eager inquiring face, he said, with a quiet depth of tone different from anything in his voice before, but scarcely as if in response to her, rather as if withdrawn from her into a soliloquy—

"No, I shall not be present at the games. I was but continuing a debate in my own mind. The

gladiatorial games are barbarous. Not Christianity only, the human soul, the soul which Tertullian calls naturally Christian, protests against them. Not the Church only; beautiful wise old Athens would none of them. But you know not, here in your soft seclusion among the oranges, and roses, and figs, and vines, near the sacred catacombs, how hard it is to press on side by side with men like one's self in every path of thought and life, and then suddenly to come to some barrier which to them is a dream or an insane delusion, and to us is more solid than an imperial decree, and to have to separate and go the solitary way despised and misunderstood."

"But, Valerian," she said, "it is the King's way and a glorious way. And you might make some of them come with you; even one would be much!"

"It all seems to you so simple," he said, "here among your hymns and your gardens, and with every one around you believing the same. But there, in the city, are wise and good and learned men who think our sacred histories as much a fable as Virgil's story of Æneas landing on these hills

where we stand, and stretching out longing arms to his goddess-mother, made known to him by her majestic tread, and vanishing when he began to recognise her. And there in the city, on the other hand, are religions to whose hoary antiquity ours is but of yesterday. See! the last gleam of the sunset is crimsoning the Temple of Cœlestis, the Astarte worshipped here by multitudes of Carthaginians when Rome was but an eagle's nest on one of her seven hills."

As he spoke two strangers, a man and a woman, passed them in plain and threadbare garments.

Both had a bowed and downcast look, as of people who shrank from observation.

The man might be about sixty years of age; his face was lined with rigid deep lines, the form was bowed, but rather it seemed by want of will to be erect than by the stiffness of age. His eyes were habitually downcast—never lifted up. When the heavy eyelids were raised, and the glance was forward, it seemed as if the eyes had ceased to be messengers of the soul within, and were no longer

anything save sentinels to guard from danger or surprise without. The light of human meaning and communion had passed from them—they had become mere organs of vision.

The woman was younger, and in her eyes there was a depth of appeal. She always seemed looking up, always crouching below every creature she looked at, with a wistful deprecation like a beaten dog. Not long together, however, were those longing, deprecating, appealing eyes ever absent from her companion; though as they rested on him the expression changed to one of tender, pained solicitude and care; the appeal passed out of them, apparently from the hopelessness of response, for on her his eyes never rested.

As they passed Viola made the sign of the cross, to which the woman responded, not, as usual, by repeating it, but by bowing low, and with quivering lips for one moment gazing full into Viola's eyes, with a look which was a prayer, and which Viola instinctively felt to be an entreaty for help of any kind she could give, and to which she instinctively responded by giving her bread and a bunch of

raisins from her scrip, and by saying, "The good Lord bless thee and thine!"

The woman received the bread and the benediction with a mute Oriental gesture of reverence, pressing the girl's hand on her own brow, and the two passed on, out of sight.

"Who are these?" asked Valerian; "and how do you know them?"

"I do not know them," Viola said. "I only saw them this morning. They went towards the hill of the catacombs. I think they have spent the day among the martyrs' tombs. You know it is the eve of the natalitia of Perpetua and Felicitas."

"What can they have done?" said Valerian. "They look like creatures who have fallen below hope of pity, or of rising. And yet she acknowledged the cross."

The brother and sister went down together to the farm in the valley, but as they went Valerian kept recurring to the two strangers.

"Under the cross," he said, "yet without hope! Can they have fallen under the great shadow of Tertullian? Cleansed in baptism, and then fallen,

one or both of them, into some great crime, from which there is no fresh stream to lave."

"It is better to listen to Tertullian first than last, brother," said Viola.

"Surely," he said, "if at all. The sternest guides are the most merciful while the way is yet to tread."

"But, Valerian," she said suddenly, "this was to be a great day with you; your oration?"

He seemed unwilling to enter on the subject.

"I am not afraid how it would be received," she said proudly. "But tell me, I want to hear the echo of the dear praise of thee."

"There was more than enough of that," he said.

"But what of that? As Tertullian said, in the spirit of all he wrote, 'we do not stoop to stand at that tribunal.' What is success to a Christian? What is it but climbing to a pedestal, where, after all, you have to stand bowed under a cross? What are pedestals for us but scaffolds?"

"Something has saddened thee to-day," she said.

"Nothing but the old conflict," he replied.

"But," she said, "you spoke but just now as if our grandmother thought too solicitously of the conflict. You spoke of the heathen growing gentler."

"Yes, those of our own rank. But it is that which makes it hard to keep to our discipline. You can strike telling blows against ice, but when the ice has melted into water, and the water is evaporated into enervating moisture, enveloping, softening, relaxing every limb, who can fight against that? When the heathen set the Christ on the cross and mocked Him, it was clear what the loyalty of the faithful meant; but when, like Philip the Arabian, they set Him on a marble pedestal beside Socrates and Apollonius of Tyana, and worship them together in the lararium, it is not so easy to refuse the kindly acknowledgment, and to declare that we can accept such divided homage as little as mockery; that He is King and Lord, or nothing. To be called a morose bigot seems harder, at least to me, than to be called a deluded enthusiast."

"Would it be?" she said. "But ah, Valerian! it is the other people we have to think of, is it not?"

We do not want them to tolerate us. Do we? That matters so little. We want them to worship Him! Think what it must be to have no Holy Eucharist, no hymns, no prayers, no blessed Cross, no crucified, no living Christ!"

He was silent some minutes.

"It would be a blank beyond all things to thee," he said; then in a low voice, "to thee, beloved, surely, and also," he added, as if to himself, "to me—yes, to me. But to the Christians who seek rich marriages with the heathen, who are content that their dearest should worship Venus Urania, or Jove, or nothing, provided they bring as dowry ancestors, or vineyards, or troops of slaves; who are as eager as Jews or heathen about the price of their cargoes; to the Christian women who as Tertullian said delight themselves in their jewels, peacocks, monkeys, little Maltese dogs; would the loss of Him leave such a blank, leaving them their rich marriages, their ancestors, their great cargoes, or their little Maltese dogs?"

"Ah, Valerian," she said, "do not let us be hard. The necessity to choose would make them choose

right, would show what are the shadows and what is the imperishable substance."

"Certainly," he said gravely, "a decree which called us to the arena to be torn in pieces for the amusement of our fellow-citizens would at all events decide whether the arena was a desirable entertainment for Christians or not."

They had reached a point from which Carthage lay spread before them. Across a wilderness of undulating gardens and cornfields, interspersed with villas and farms, from which the perfume of roses and jessamine and countless flowers came up to them with a heavy wealth of sweetness through the dewy evening air, temple and fortress rose before them, white and shining in the moonlight, with the innumerable moving lights of the city reflected in the bay, and mingling with the lights in the merchant fleets. The planet Venus threw a long trail of golden light across the rippling sea, whilst in the city the lights were streaming in another long trail up to the Temple of Astarte.

"Venus Urania," said Valerian, "there and here! Dea Coelestis, Queen of Heaven:

'Vera incessu patuit Dea.'

See her golden footprints on the waves; and there in the torchlight procession to her temple on the height. Twenty years since the Emperor Heliogabalus had the goddess borne to Rome to be espoused to the Sun on the Capitol, and danced in degrading pomp at her priest before her. She saw Tyre rise before an eaglet in the eagle's nest at Rome had been fledged. She saw Carthage rise, and received the adoration of Queen Dido more than two centuries before the Babe lay in the manger at Bethlehem. Helpless she saw Carthage fall under the feet of conquering Rome. And now Rome is here at her feet. And they are adoring her with evil worship still, now that the pure light of the Holy One has been more than two centuries in the world. Is it any wonder that the heathen say, 'You are of yesterday and will be gone to-morrow'?"

"'We are of yesterday,' Tertullian said, 'and we fill your palaces,'” Viola quoted in a low voice.

"It is true," he said. "But sometimes, sometimes, I think the combat is far from being over. And I think the attack might come from two sides:

the mob, who cling blindly to their old superstitions, rooted with hidden roots far down in their dim unrecorded lives, and are always liable to be roused against us in pestilences and public calamities as atheists and enemies of the gods; and the philosophers, whose mild objection to our faith, as fanaticism, could easily become mildly destructive to us if our faith came as an immovable obstacle in the way of any plan of state of their own."

"And it is all this you have been feeling to-day," she said. "While we in our quiet fields have been dreaming of your oration and your triumph, you have been in the arena, and have been pricked with delicate shafts of ridicule, and buffeted with angry words and looks from the heathen mob whose path you crossed."

"Buffeted is too severe a word, little sister," he said, rising to the gaiety as habitual to him as its shadow of melancholy; "pricked—yes, pricked with delicate jewelled daggerlets, matronly and maidenly pins, and not at all enjoying my martyrdom."

CHAPTER II.

THE sound of the Christian evening hymn reached the brother and sister as they entered the court.

In a moment they had quitted the welcoming dogs and entered the atrium, reverently crossing themselves, added their voices to the family choir. It was the hymn at the lighting of the lamps.

“ Joyful light of holy glory,
Of the Immortal Holy Father,
Holy, blessed,
Jesu Christ!
We, coming at the setting of the sun,
Beholding the evening light,
Praise Father and Son
And Holy Spirit, God..
Thee it is meet
At all hours to praise
With sacred voices, Son of God,
Thou who givest life,
Therefore the world glorifies Thee.”

The household gathered for the evening prayer
—slaves, field labourers, the four brothers and sisters,

and the aged grandmother, and scattered afterwards for the evening meal.

Crossing themselves on brow and breast, the brothers and sisters ranged themselves on the couches round the small table, and dipped their bread in the same dish.

The family habits were partly Oriental and partly Roman, modified by the greater freedom which the greater purity of Christian life already began to impart to social customs.

This little household never expanded into entertainments at which the sisters and the grandmother could not have been present, though sometimes, if venerable men—clergymen or officers of state—happened to be there, Viola and her elder sister, Justa, would be among those that served, bearing the cup or the fruit to some specially honoured guest.

This evening the family generally pressed on Valerian for news of the reception of his oration and of the great secular games in the city.

The eldest brother, Clement, especially had a paternal eagerness to hear, and extracted from Valerian, by degrees, the fact that the oration had

been enthusiastically received, and that honours and offices of the highest had been prophesied for him.

Clement was seven years older than Valerian, and had early "ripened" into manhood and protectiveness by the "sudden frost" of the death of his parents in the great invasion and slaughter by the Numidians, when the two Emperors Gordian were slain in one day.

That had happened ten years before, and all the ten years had been spent by Clement in supplying the place of the lost parents to the younger ones, and rebuilding the ruined fortunes of the house.

Their younger brothers had been killed by the marauders. The eldest sister, Justa, had been left for dead, and had only by tender nursing been won back lamed and enfeebled to a life of weakness and suffering.

Valerian and Viola, children of ten and nine, with the grandmother, had been hidden in the catacombs under the neighbouring hills by a Christian slave.

The intervening ten years of both the brothers

had been spent on battle-fields, but in battles of an entirely different kind; and the traces were visible on the frames and faces of both.

Clement had been engaged in a hand-to-hand struggle with nature and the devastations of war. The farm had been the scene of a sharp skirmish; and when the marauders had retreated, and the remnant of fruits and corn and wine which they had left had been demanded by the authorities of the city as a contribution to the fine which had been imposed as the price of their retreat, Clement found himself heir of a half-burned and ruined house among trampled fields and vineyards, and fig-trees scarred and scorched by fire, and master of the remnant of two families of slaves which had been left behind as useless burdens. All who could fight or work had been slain or led away captive; and there were no arms to help him in his toil but those of two old men and their wives and three grandchildren.

But Clement never lost heart. Reverently and tenderly he gathered from the ruined home the ashes—scarcely more than ashes—of parents and

brothers; and for once, by sad necessity, abandoning the Christian mode of sepulture, returned to the old Roman customs of his race and placed them in urns.

Priests and deacons came from Carthage and laid the sacred urns on three of the ledges of the ancient Phœnician catacombs under the hills, which the Christians had appropriated to themselves.

Sunday by Sunday he had never failed to have some offering of bread and wine, saved from whatever hunger and poverty, to lay on the Christian altar, commemorative of the blessed departed. And resolutely uncomplaining as any of his mother's ancient Roman house, he set himself to battle for life for the two sisters and the young brother they had left to his charge; an inspiring tangible contest with tangible foes of nature and circumstance, and an inspiring, visible victory.

The conflict had left its mark in his broad sinewy frame, his strong and knotted hands, his frank, determined, sunburnt face, and the quiet command of his eye and voice. Day by day it had also left its records in the clearing of some waste, the re-

building of some ruin; though it were only a few inches set in order, or a few stones replaced, every night saw something accomplished.

Every room of the homestead, every field of the farm, was to him dear not only as an inheritance but a conquest, a conquest for his beloved, for his dead parents' beloved.

Work had been his delight and pride, the glorious human work of giving law, and so giving freedom and fruitfulness, to nature.

The fields and gardens, to which he had by the sweat of his brow brought the waters they thirsted for, seemed to sing and smile for him and his.

That very day they had finished roofing again one of the old Carthaginian tanks on the hill-sides, and after supper he went with Valerian to see the completed work which was so soon in that fiery sun and fertile soil to change a rocky hillside into an Eden.

As they climbed the terraces, the chief share in the dialogue fell, in a way very unusual between the brothers, to the elder.

To Clement, the world of knowledge and thought,

in which the work of his hands and the command of his will had enabled Valerian to live, was an unknown territory in which he believed with as simple a reverence as in the unseen spiritual world around and above them both. And to the histories of ancient nations and men, the stories of the acts and works of the heroes, the resonant battles or responsive amens of the thinkers, the sages, and philosophers, the creations of the poets, he listened with unceasing delight as they poured in eloquent talk from the lips of Valerian.

But to-night Valerian was silent, and as they went from field to field and terrace to terrace Clement was drawn into pointing out the steps of his slow work of restoration and repair; here, the completing of a broken terrace from the ruins of some old Punic dwelling, there the clearing of a field of the stones with which it was walled round; here carefully paved channels to carry off and economise the rains of the sudden storms, or of the continued rainy season; until at last they stood on a corridor within the fine old Carthaginian tank, their steps and voices echoing in the hollow vault at the edge

of the deep pool, which would soon be precious as a store of gold to the dry and thirsty land; and Clement pointed out the new repairs, made with material and workmanship worthy of the old.

Then they sate down a few minutes on a bank outside, looking down over olives, vines, figs, and corn-fields melted to a dreamy grey in the moonlight.

The external contrast between the brothers was as great as that in their lives.

Clement, of that old Roman type, not unlike the best English, broad-browed, broad-chested, sinewy, muscular, with frank, steady blue eyes, and a mouth and chin the strength and determination of which the fair beard did not hide, his tread firm and purpose-like as that of a practised mountaineer beginning a long climb, and bent on not wasting a step; Valerian, southern in every look and limb, lithe, agile, with a spring and grace in every movement, which seemed to scorn the possibility of fatigue, dark eyes alternately flashing or melancholy, a countenance whose expression in repose you

scarcely knew, so brilliant and mobile and penetrated with life was it in every feature.

His listening was often more eloquent than what he listened to, so full was the face of quick sympathetic response; and his speech had the fascination of always blending the audience with the subject, and even in its most absorbed aspirations never being content unless the listener was borne upward along the thought which inspired the speaker.

But to-night he leant his head on his hand and was silent.

"Something has saddened thee!" Clement said at length. "But for the news that preceded thee, we should have shared little in thy triumph to day."

"The triumphs are thine, not mine," Valerian replied, "or at least the victories. And who that knows what they mean cares for triumphs? You have really repaired terribly real ravages, really rebuilt real ruins, while I have been learning shadows, fighting with shadows, ambitiously aiming at shadows."

"We are no heathen," replied Clement; "ghosts

to us are not shades. The soul, the unseen world, is more real than this transitory world we see. The depression and weariness of victory are on thee. But thou hast overcome."

"*What* have I overcome?" was the desponding reply. "The whole dear ancestral farm is a series of trophies of your victories. Where are the trophies of mine?"

"You have conquered your place in the world. You are known to be a power worth having on any side. Every career is open to you."

"To me, to *us*, what careers are open?" was the reply. "We cannot be soldiers—at least men think so, Tertullian would have thought so—because of the sacrificing for the Emperor. We cannot be sculptors, and that I could be," he added with a sad consciousness of unavailing power; "our every stroke of the chisel on the glorious Greek gods would be like a treacherous blow, nailing the Sacred One afresh to the cross. It is hard for us to be in office without denying our highest allegiance, or to be advocates or rhetoricians without becoming entangled in the meshes of these evil days."

"Can you *not* be a soldier, a sculptor, a statesman, a rhetorician, an advocate, simply to disentangle the evil meshes of the time, to untwist the demoniacal beauty and plausibility of the false image from the true? Can you not be a sculptor of Divine beauty, a soldier supremely of the King of kings, a pleader for the widow and the fatherless, and eloquent to teach the highest truth?"

"That were to be a priest, Clement; and for the ascetic discipline of the highest life I have not seemed to have a call, at least not anything like a steady bent. The world is so flooded with life. I want to *live*, to live the fullest possible life; pure, but complete, and complete because pure; but not stunted, renouncing, self-repressed."

"We are baptized," said Clement dubiously. "We have taken up the cross."

"What does all that mean?" was the almost fierce reply. "What do we renounce? what cross weighs on you here in your seclusion? What contest are you engaged in, but the grand old human contest of subduing nature, or rather of liberating nature from her enemies?"

"My battle here does seem becoming a war of liberation," Clement replied. "The ravages of men are repaired at last. And now what we have to do is to set the waters free by imprisoning them for a while in their cool-roofed reservoirs, to do their ministering to the fields and all the living creatures; to set the true plants and trees free from the false parasites and weeds, and the false luxuriance of their own rank growth; to set the very sunbeams free to fertilise the earth by blending them with the waters. But is not the Church engaged in just such a war?"

"You are right, brother; you have conquered," Valerian replied. "But believe me, the hardest fights are with the shadows—the unrealities; the shadowy Christians to whom the renounced world still seems the substance, the shadowy philosophers to whom all is alike unknowable, and by whom any firm conviction is smiled at as an innocent dream of unawakened childhood, or resented as a fanaticism on a par with the superstitions of the common people. The reply among the educated men I meet to my pleading for the Faith is not an angry

repulse, but an easy smile, a shrug, and a contemptuous admission that all these things are conceivable. 'But what can you or we *know*? Who thinks he knows anything certainly, save those who know nothing?'"

"Listen!" he continued. "We have both been engaged in a campaign. But yours has been simple: to liberate the true nature from the false, to set her free by enabling her to be subject to her own true inward laws. Every creature has its foes, has it not, within or without? The vine has insects, mildews, and also its own false luxuriance of leaf instead of true fruitfulness of grapes; the corn, which has no existence except in fruit, which is grain or nothing, is, perhaps, the happiest. The tares choke it; it withers, but cannot exist wild and degenerate. It is true corn, or ceases to be. And to all these lower creatures of our God you have come as a liberator and a king, restoring them their true liberty in restoring them to His laws. But with me the battle has been inward and not simple. My soul vibrates between the questions—Shall I give myself to the nature which God surely made,

simply expand into all wealth of thought and utterance and pure human love, take all the gold and purple, human and natural, loving it as simply in sculpture and in palaces as in fields and gardens and sunlit heavens—take all beauty as the heritage of the sons of God?—or is the cross after all the true highest law, as Tertullian thinks—he whom the great Cyprian calls master, and reads daily? Is the free air reached only by the rugged, upward path? Are there joys of the Paraclete, is there a strength of the Spirit worth all beside, only to be reached by those who renounce, and lead the ascetic life?”

Clement passed his hand with a gesture of perplexity across his brow.

“How can I answer thee? I, whose life has been so simple! For thou knowest, whatever poetical symbols may shine to thee (and sometimes to me) in this old warfare against Nature, for Nature, with Nature, the inspiration and aim of my daily toil has been simply to replace the lost parents and the lost heritage to thee and thy sisters; to enable thee to pursue thy true calling among the instructed, to give comforts to the dear lame Justa, to make the

youth of our little Viola joyous, and to endow her for marriage. I have been no Hercules conquering dragons, only a lay deacon serving tables; and perhaps," he added, "for the heart knows its own temptations, sometimes in danger of getting too fond of the tables I serve, making idol-altars of them."

"Thy life has been simple," Valerian said, "because its inspiration has been love, free because its law has been love. Teach me how, in my world, to make mine like it."

CHAPTER III.

WHEN they reached the house the sisters were resting at the feet of the grandmother, as she sate erect, with crossed hands, in the old carved and curved ivory chair.

"The grandmother is telling us once more the story of the martyrs, the martyrs she saw suffer."

"They whose death was birth into new life for me," said the old Roman matron.

"Tell it us, mother," Valerian said. "It is like a deep fountain, cool and clear, in the heart of the hills. And these times are feverish. Let us bathe once more in the old wells."

"You would have the old story once more from the old lips?" she said. "God forbid that they should refuse to bear witness to the blessed, with whom they will soon, by the grace of Christ, be joining, however far below them, in the praises of the King.

"I was young myself, children, younger than our Justa, as young as the young noble matron herself, Vivia Perpetua, and like her I was rejoicing in my first babe, your own mother. And, moreover, I had seen the gracious creature, and we had conversed and compared our infants in the fashion of young mothers; hers being a son and mine a daughter. Her father was a pagan, and our families had known each other; but her mother was a Christian, and she and her brother catechumens. The intimacy had been shunned of late by my parents. For even in my youth it was perceived that there was a perilous contagion in the faith.

"There was a peculiar tenderness of family love in that family; that also, we had seen, often came with the Christian doctrine. It shone back even on heathen relations, and I had often observed the pride and delight of Perpetua's father in his daughter and her babe.

"Therefore it touched me much when, at one of our pagan festivals, my father brought home the tidings that the fair young matron, the Lady Perpetua, had been rudely dragged before the tribunals,

with her young brother, the young slave woman called Felicitas, and two other young men.

"It moved my father much to see the noble young Roman lady dragged forward to be mocked at and insulted by the low, mixed mob of Carthage. 'Her bearing was worthy of her ancestry and of Rome,' he said, 'simple and calm.' No doubt she bore herself as one who has nothing but truth to say, to whom the judgment-seat she stood at, as well as the mob who insulted her, were not her true tribunal nor her true city; citizen of another city, and always standing before the Invisible Judge.

"Her unhappy heathen father, to whom no higher tribunal was known, trembled and entreated for his child. She trembled at nothing, and was only moved by his tears, as in his tender affection he persevered in his efforts to 'cast her down.' '*Cast her down,*' the blessed one called it, knowing herself to be, not as she seemed, abject under the feet of men, but on a height and in a refuge they could not reach.

"*'My father,'* she said, *'this vessel, be it a pitcher or anything else, can we call it by anything*

but its right name?' 'Certainly not,' he replied. 'Nor can I,' she said, 'call myself by any other name but that of Christian.' She could not, *could* not, beloved, living in the very heart of the Truth, say anything untrue. A fierce resentment against her obstinacy flashed in his eyes; for her sake almost hating her very self; and he departed.

"From that time I gleaned every fragment of tidings I could of her. I can scarcely now distinguish what I heard from others from what I learned from the narrative she wrote herself.

"It was this impossibility of untruth which moved me, so easy and so harmless as it seems to dissemble.

"Truth was before her as a great sacred reality, which could be lived in, consciously known and breathed in, and which, being breathed, made falsehood impossible.

"No one around me so thought of truth. Religion was a convenient custom; the stories of the gods fair legends from which no one could attempt to disentangle the false; the opinions of the sages endless debates, in which one logical conclusion was that

there was no spirit, and the other that there was no matter; some that our bodies, some that our souls, and many that both, were a shadow and a dream.

"Afterwards, *what this truth is* became the great question to me, *what it means* to be a Christian? But at first it was simply this, that *truth exists*.

"There was a delay of a few days before the five Christians were placed under strict guard. The clergy of the Church had access to them. I went more than once to see the young mother, and ventured for old kindness' sake to carry her fruit or flowers. And so it happened that I was present at the baptism of the five martyrs in the prison chambers—the first baptism, beloved, I saw. And I think you have scarcely seen one so moving: laved in the sacred flood, to sit so soon at the sacred table with the Christ himself; cleansed in precious blood for the shedding of their own; robed in white for the marriage-supper of the Lamb.

"Calm and simple as always, Perpetua said, 'The Spirit prompted me at my baptism to pray for nothing but patience.' The light of it was on her face. 'The waters of baptism,' she said, 'seemed to

give powers of endurance to my body.' And after that I saw her no more for many days.

"They were cast into the common dungeon. And brave as she was, the darkness and the heat and the insults weighed the delicately nurtured lady down.

"Rude words and polluted, stifling air tried her, and darkness. She, as much as you or I, had been kept from being soiled by an insulting look, and she shrank and trembled. And before her was the agony and shame of the arena; yet from that she shrank not.

"'O miserable day!' she said, 'from the dreadful heat of the prisoners crowded together and the insults of the soldiers. I was terrified, for I had never seen such total darkness before. I was torn with anxiety for my infant. Two of our deacons, for money, obtained our removal, a few hours each day, to a more open part of the prison. There each of the captives pursued his usual occupation; but I sate and suckled my infant, who was wasting away with hunger.' Yet in the midst of her own trouble

she spoke to her mother and comforted her, and commended the child to her brother.

“Child, woman of rank, mother, daughter, she dreaded the horror of darkness, she shrank from a rude word, she suffered in the sufferings of her parents, she pined with her babe.

“And yet from confessing her Lord she never shrank one instant.

“And his joy overflowed the terror and the suffering, and even the sympathetic sorrow for the sorrow she caused to her beloved.

“Death in her was swallowed up of life. She recovered strength. She was relieved from her toil and trouble for her infant. The prison became to her as a palace. They brought the martyrs the Holy Eucharist in the prison. ‘I was happier there,’ she said, ‘than I could have been anywhere else.’

“Lovely visions came to her at night. She saw a ladder of gold, with a great dragon at its foot. But, as they went up, the dragon couched like a tame dog; and at the top was a fair, wide garden. There sate the Good Shepherd amongst His sheep, and He gave her food, and she took it with folded

hands, and the Amen of the saints came to her, and she awoke with the music in her heart and the sweet taste of the heavenly food in her mouth.

“And when she told the dream to her brother, they knew that hope for them in this world there was no more.

“Once more her aged father came to her in the prison. All the anger had gone from his poor worn face. Wasted with grief and anxiety, he threw himself at her feet, fondly he kissed her hands; weeping sore, he called her not daughter, but domina, lady, mistress. ‘Have compassion,’ he said, ‘on my grey hairs; have compassion on thy father. If I have brought thee up to the flower of thy age, if I have loved thee beyond all thy brothers, do not expose me to this disgrace. Look on thy mother, thy brother, thy aunt, thy child—who cannot live without thee. Do not ruin us all. For if thou doest thus, none of us again will be able to bear ourselves as free citizens.’

“And bitterly she grieved for him. For to his grey hairs, him alone of all her family, her martyrdom brought nothing but shame and anguish, and

no compensating joy. She tried to console him by saying, 'What will happen at the tribunal will be what God wills. For we stand not in our own strength, but in the power of God.'

"But he went away sorrowing.

"Once more she stood at the tribunal. Her father sought to move her by coming with her babe in his arms, and the heathen tried to move her by what they thought would move her most. They threw down her father and beat the old man with rods. But she could not change nor flinch, though it was harder to her than to be so scourged herself. 'Spare the grey hairs of your father,' they cried, 'spare your babe, offer sacrifice for the welfare of the Emperor.'

"She answered, 'I will not sacrifice.'

"'Art thou a Christian?' said the judge.

"'I am a Christian,' she said.

"Then sentence was passed on them all. They were condemned to be torn by the wild beasts in the arena. And they went back to the prison, content. Old memories of her childhood came back to her there, at the threshold of her Father's house. She

dreamed of her little brother who had died of a sore disease at seven years old. She thought she saw him in a dark place, thirsty and helpless, by a fountain of water he was too little to reach. She prayed for him. And she saw him once again in a second vision, and the fountain welled up and touched him, and there was a cup by it, and he drank it all, and went away content, as children are wont, to play. So she knew he was translated to a happy place.

"The hearts of the gaolers were softened, they suffered the brethren to come and comfort the martyrs.

"With a doubtful mercy, the old father to come and enquire with his worn, wasted grey hairs, throwing on the ground, prayer which must have

"By day and night, visions of Him they saw in the gardens, palaces with the presence of angels and of old men of m

ings in that place of peace, between brethren who had striven fiercely in controversy on earth. As, in one of these visions, Perpetua was conversing with some such, the blessed peace-bringing angels came and reconciled the former combatants.

“Ah, beloved, I have often thought of that! Will not the blessed angels so reconcile many by-and-by?

“Good it were to live as those did, at the threshold of the Home, though it were a prison, and catch something of the reconciling hands and tones even here.

“For in the stress and the peril, as in the perfect light, many a subject of fierce contention melts away. Many who would not listen in ordinary times to the Divine words spoken through a woman’s lips are fain to drink them in on the steps of the arena, on the steps of the Father’s house.

“And then, beloved, the end, the terrible tumult of their death!—the unutterable calm and love and peace of their death!—which fifty years ago I saw, and through which I live to-day.

“They endeavoured to clothe them in purple as

priests of Saturn, and with garlands as priestesses of Ceres.

"But meekly submitting as they did to all personal wrong and pain, to this they would not submit. The King was concerned in this, and they could not yield.

"‘We have come here of our own will,’ they said, ‘that our freedom be not taken from us. We have given our lives not to do this very thing.’

"And the justice God has implanted in the souls of the heathen bore witness for them. They were suffered to come into the arena in their every-day dress.

"It was their last resistance.

"Perpetua and Felicitas, the lady and the slave, were enclosed in nets and tossed by a furious cow. When afterwards they lay wounded on the arena, Perpetua calmly drew her rent robe over her, and clasped up her long, loosened tresses; because it became not a martyr, bearing witness for the King of kings, as at a festival, and going to be crowned of Him, to suffer with dishevelled locks, as at a funeral.

"Then she crept to where her fellow-sufferer Felicitas lay, faint, wounded, and dying, and raised her up in her arms, the lady only privileged above the slave in being permitted to serve to the last.

"Mightier and tenderer arms were around them both. Felicitas had said, 'In the arena, I shall not suffer alone. *Another* will bear it all with me.' And they found it so.

"For Perpetua herself, all pain and shame seemed lost in ecstasy. For she asked, 'when she was to be given to the wild beast,' as if that were all yet to come; she could scarcely be made to believe it was over.

"With her dying breath she tenderly encouraged her young brother to be steadfast to the last. And then she gently guided the sword of the gladiator which finished her life—which began her life, beloved! And began life in we know not how many, and, as you know, in me. Fifty years ago, and fresh to-day as then!

"For she first revealed to me that truth exists and can be known by us here on earth. And she

first revealed to me that there is a relationship closer than that of mother, father, or child, a love which makes all other love unutterably deeper, and yet is itself unutterably deeper than all."

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CHAPTER IV.

THE paths through the gardens and vineyards which Valerian and Viola had trodden alone the night before were made joyous the next morning by the gathering of the whole Church of Carthage to the Natal Festival of the Martyrs.

From all quarters of Carthage they came; from the villas along the shore, and from the remoter country. Amongst them some slaves; and not a few women of high rank, borne in rich-curtained litters, and men high in office and rank, marked by their broad-bordered robes. But the majority were from the middle-classes, prosperous, industrious tradesmen, skilled artisans, rich freedmen, shipowners, and merchants.

Ancient ancestry, especially if Roman or Latin, had its value. But in an empire, in which the supreme power had so seldom descended thrice in one family, and which lately had been subject to

one barbarian after another, hereditary rank had comparatively little weight. To be a Roman was still something, and, among Romans, to belong to an old patrician house was still something more, and a great legendary Greek ancestry had its charm for educated men; but in a provincial city like Carthage, too many ancestries, more ancient than Rome herself, had been crumbled down beneath the tyranny of military conquest for birth to take any stand in comparison with office.

And the honour paid to office in an empire where the imperial source of all official rank had been often so basely won and so briefly held was of the most lowering kind.

The enthusiasm of loyalty did not exist, the enthusiasm of patriotism, in the subject nations, had been crushed out, and with Romans had been debased into a mere jealous guarding of a privileged caste.

In the Church alone both these great inspirations were felt;—in her loyalty to the King Immortal and Invisible, who had created her by dying; in the patriotism to the great Christian nation born of one Father, through whose veins flowed one sacred blood,

which thrilled with one sympathetic life, whether in suffering or in thanksgiving, from Phrygia to Lyons, from Egypt to Rome, from Rome to Carthage and Spain.

So, the community at Carthage met that morning, not as an isolated colony, but as a portion of a great state, a great kingdom.

Whether or not in a majority, as Tertullian had asserted of Carthage, they were advancing to be the majority throughout the empire, by the force of youth in the midst of a world in its decrepitude.

There was no concealment in this festival. The heathen knew why they met.

More than half a century since, before Perpetua died, Tertullian had written his apology rather in the tone of an assault than a defence: had summoned the magistrates before his higher Tribunal, rather than pleaded before theirs.

And to-day there was a freedom and a joyousness about the meetings and greetings which gave the assembly a national as well as a religious character.

That morning, also, there was a recent convert

among them from the high places of heathenism—Thascius Cyprian, a man of wealth and standing, convinced late in middle life of the truth of Christianity, bringing to the service of the Church a finished eloquence and a statesman's training. A hush of welcome greeted him as he passed along, and the "grave joyousness" of his manner, on this his first celebration of the martyrs, threw an additional light on the feast to many.

And yet, as he passed, doubtless his eyes were quietly taking in the pomp of dress, the jewelled necklaces, and sky-blue robes and golden fillets, for which he afterwards reprehended Christian women.

The thirty years of peace had, he thought, relaxed the nerve and sinew of Christian life; and it needed such a conversion as his, from the absolute outside of idolatrous heathenism, to make the indelible contrast once more vividly perceived.

His own dress was marked by no peculiar asceticism. Dearly as he honoured Tertullian, "the master," he did not assume the philosopher's pall which Tertullian thought the befitting dress for a Christian. But he, coming from the unchanged world outside,

felt keenly the differences which to many born within the fold, and only knowing the heathen world from outside, seemed faint and all but effaced.

It was a joyous meeting, the happy voices of children nurtured in Christian homes, and young maidens trooping to lay on the sacred graves the garlands with which Tertullian had told them it was a degradation to crown their own brows.

A tender feeling of reverence for the glorious confessors, and of a corporate possession in their passion and their victory blended with the natural human joy of meeting with any sympathetic purpose. But on none save those who had long passed the prime of life had the terrible shadow of persecution fallen, and scarcely one heart was saddened by a shadow of dread that on that rugged and sanguinary path any then present would ever be called to tread.

The blessed Cross of Redemption itself seemed scarcely farther off than that day of tumult and triumph in the arena of Carthage.

The Cross was commemorated by the Eucharistic Feast, and the martyrdom by garlands and hymns;

and both lay deep in the foundations of the Church, and above began to rise the fair and sublime House of God for all nations. Surely the times of fulfilment were drawing near!

The four brothers and sisters came together among the vines to the hill of the catacombs, as bright a group as any there; the brothers first, carrying a basket with the offering of bread and wine—wine from their own grapes and bread from their own granaries—and the sisters following with garlands of richly scented flowers, bells, and cups, and crowns of creamy white and gorgeous crimson and purple, pouring out their perfume in the cool morning air—flowers carefully cultivated to render this homage; and mingled with them, by a fancy of Viola's, bunches of sweet wild blossoms, lest, she said, "Nature's own free offerings and gifts to the poorest—the little children of the woods and fields—should seem to be forbidden to come to Him who paid such honour to their lily kindred in Syria of old."

At length they reached the entrance of the catacombs; and one group after another passed from the

glow of the sunshine into the twilight and coolness of the vaulted chambers of the ancient Phœnician dead, now appropriated to Christian burial. There the offerings of bread and wine, taken from their hands, were laid by the deacons on the altar, offerings for the departed and the present, the Church visible and invisible, the living here below and the living with God. And the garlands were heaped on tomb and floor.

. The Acts of the Martyrs were read and prayers offered; those pathetic prayers of the old Liturgies which revealed in their detail of intercession how rough and perilous still was the path the Church had to tread.

“Remember, O Lord, Christians sailing and travelling; our fathers and brethren who are in bonds, captivity, and exile; who are in mines, and under torture and bitter slavery. Have mercy on all who are in prison, or in mines, or on trial, or condemned, or in exile, or crushed by cruel bondage or tribute. Deliver them, O Lord, for thou art our God, who settest the captives free; who raisest up the down-trodden; who givest hope to the hopeless and help to

the helpless; who liftest up the fallen; who givest refuge to the shipwrecked and vengeance to the oppressed. Pity, relieve, and restore every Christian soul that is afflicted or wandering. But do thou, O Lord, the physician of our souls and bodies, the guardian of all flesh, look down, and by Thy saving power heal all the diseases of soul and body.

“Send down copious showers on dry and thirsty lands. Gladden and revive the face of the earth, that it may spring forth and rejoice in the raindrops. Make the rivers flow in full stream.

“Have mercy on all creatures; spare the guilty; convert the erring; restore the oppressed; on the disquieted bestow rest; heal the weak; console the afflicted; and perfect the alms of those who work righteousness on account of Thy holy name.

“Sanctify also, O Lord, our souls and bodies and spirits, and touch our understandings, search our consciences, and cast out from us every evil imagination, every impure feeling, every base desire, every unbecoming thought, all envy and vanity and hypocrisy, all lying, all deceit, all wantonness, all wrangling, all indifference, every motive of the flesh and

spirit that is not in accordance with Thy holy will. Remember, O Lord, the spirits of all flesh of whom we have made mention, and of whom we have not made mention, who are of the true faith, from righteous Abel unto this day; unto them do thou give rest, those in the land of the living, in Thy kingdom, in the joy of Paradise, in the bosom of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, our holy fathers; whence pain and grief and lamentation have fled; there the light of Thy countenance looks upon them and enlightens them for ever."

To the early Church, the family in earth and heaven were truly one; the place of the departed was not the land of the dead where all things are forgotten, it was "the land of the living."

The sacred responsive call which has echoed through the church for nearly two thousand years, sounded solemnly under the ancient vaults beneath the hills.

The solitary voice commanding—

"Lift up your hearts;"

the whole congregation pealing back the answer—

"We lift them up to the Lord."

Afterwards the whole assembly, for a time, kept motionless silence, before the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Eucharistical, joyful, the spirit of freedom and thanksgiving seemed to pervade the whole.

The faithful footsteps of those they delighted to honour had opened a bright path for those that followed; the sacred blood of sacrifice came to them in the wine of joy and the bread of daily sustenance.

Yet always these elements, in the symbolism of Christian life, are reconvertible. And on the utmost verge of the united joyous company knelt two who bore on every feature commemoration of the bitterest kind.

When the service was over, and the brothers and sisters were preparing to go home, in the shadow of the rocky hill under which the catacombs were excavated, Valerian's eye fell on the crouching forms of the man and woman who had crossed his and Viola's path the evening before.

The same downcast, hopeless, stony look on the face of the man; the same imploring, appealing, yet

unexpected upward gaze in the woman, unchanged and unillumined by any of the joy around them.

Moved by an instinct of compassion, and attracted by a kind of gloomy fascination, Valerian went up to them apart, and spoke in a low voice to the woman.

"Can I—can the priest here do nothing for you? He is a wise man and pitiful."

"Pity is not for us, at least not for me," she said.

Valerian turned to the man.

As he looked, the stony features and frame grew yet more rigid, and the sufferer sank helpless and unconscious on the ground.

Clement and his sisters had gone out of sight, swept on with the joyous multitude. Valerian lingered to give what help he could. He would have raised the rigid form and opened the closed lips to pour in wine. But the woman gently laid her hand on his, and refused all aid.

"Do not arouse him one moment before it must be," she said. "Why should he be conscious of his anguish one moment longer than must be? Depart

from us, we are polluted," she said; "we sacrificed for Cæsar in the persecution of Maximin. I persuaded him, because our love and happiness were so great. Now he will never know forgiveness on earth, and in heaven he can never again love or forgive me. We are lapsed, we are *Sacrificati*—of the worst and most unpardonable. He has nothing to plead but the dead love for me. I have nothing to plead but the devilish selfishness which I thought love for him. We were not threatened with torture or death, only with separation, exile, and the mines. And now we are together—*always*—and *never*: his very soul closed and separated from me."

Valerian shuddered and half withdrew, so deep was the horror of treachery against Christ.

"Why do you stay with him?"

She smiled a sad wondering smile.

"Did you never love?" she said. "If my mortal life could be poured out in one drop, which could soothe for an hour the anguish I have caused him, would it not be well spent?"

An impulse of unquenchable pity mastered him,

and lifted him for a moment above the mists of his time and region.

"Our Lord poured out all his immortal life," he said, "my sister, for thee, for me; in Him love is stronger than sin, than death, than all. Who knows but that through all this anguish, though never to be soothed in this life, He is disciplining you, making you good, and may forgive you, after ages of ages, perhaps, but yet at last?" For it never entered his mind that the misery and the shame could be atoned for or blotted out here.

He signed the cross over the ashy rigid face of the man, as the wife had laid it on her knee, and over the bowed head of the woman.

"It is only when he is unconscious," she murmured, "that I can have the poor wasted frame rest in any way on me. He does not know I am sustaining him."

"Can it be? Can it be?" Valerian thought, "that the Holy One himself is so sustaining you both, although you know it not?"

But he did not say this. The horror of the disloyal betrayal was too strong. He only said—

"Sister! absolved or not, do not dare to look away from the Cross."

She thanked him with an upward glance; but at that moment a quiver passed through the rigid motionless frame, and she motioned Valerian away.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was much simple festivity at the farm that day, but the shadow of the two lapsed and lost Christians lay heavy on Valerian.

In the evening, when all the guests had returned to Carthage, he spoke of it in the family.

There was no division of opinion in the little family as to the enormity of the crime or the necessity of the severest penalty.

The grand and sombre shadow of Tertullian lay especially dark on the North African Church.

The existence of the whole Church was based on loyalty to an invisible King. Disloyalty to Him by an open act of treason seemed, therefore, the one unpardonable offence. It was not denied that the merciful One who blotted out St. Peter's threefold denial by a threetold commission might forgive any who so failed Him in after ages. But for the Church to pass by such a treachery seemed to be making

herself a sharer in it,—seemed an act of disloyalty in the Church herself.

“There used to be only one key to that door,” the grandmother said. “If one of the martyrs, or of those who had faithfully given themselves up to martyrdom, could plead for these guilty ones, they may, perhaps, find a place for repentance. Such honour was wont to be paid to those who had followed the Master closely. But there are no martyrs in these days.”

“It would be doubly worth while to suffer,” said Viola, “if by suffering one could so save. It would make it like our Lord’s own suffering.”

“Thascius Cyprian thinks too much has sometimes been conceded to the pleading of the martyrs,” Valerian said. “It is no mercy to make it less perilous to fall.”

“But if one *had* fallen!” said Clement.

“Surely we ought not to allow ourselves for an instant to think that possible!” Valerian replied. “To dream of having the words of denial on our lips seems in itself a treason.”

“But to dream of having the martyr’s crown on

our brow seems in itself a boast like St. Peter's," Clement replied, "and a summoning of the enemy to his worst against us. And who knows what his worst might be? What do we know, who have given up nothing, to whom the faith has been but an aid to do better the best things we could otherwise have done? Who knows how we might stand torture, or, still more, stand seeing our beloved tortured?"

"Yet it was not torture before which St. Peter fell. It was a taunt—a taunt from a slave-woman—and the Master within hearing. Is torture so much more terrible than contempt," said Valerian, "that we should dare to think it could bring us to betray?"

"We may be sure the enemy would not leave his wiles behind," said Clement, "even when he could openly wield the sword. There is always some hidden temptation behind the temptation others see, which *is* the temptation to us."

"The 'temptation of temptations,' it seems to me," said Valerian, "is that making all things shadowy; those endless suggestions that there are

two sides to everything, and that only the ignorant believe in one side enough to suffer for it."

"Ah, you all talk like inexperienced children," said the grandmother. "Not one of you has ever seen the amphitheatre, seen the eager faces full of the lust of torture, waiting for the opening of the grating. Not one of you has heard the roar of the beasts behind it. Bare torture, tearing limb from limb, in itself is *not* so easily endured *when it can be refused*. Do you think life and home and love look *less* tempting as the alternative to the rack? Do you think the only place where the devil does not suggest that there are two sides to things is in the arena?"

"I do know a little what pain is, mother," said the lame Justa timidly. "He who gives patience for the little, would surely give patience for more. Yet, indeed, if one could *choose* in the long nights, when every limb makes itself felt in pain, to have it all vanish and be in a paradise of rest, for a word, for a few grains of incense, for a prayer which, St. Paul says, being to 'nothing in the world' could do harm to no one, it might be hard to choose right."

"Sister!" said Valerian, "a word? A lie! a treason! a nail driven into the crucified Christ!"

"I was not thinking of ourselves, but of the poor lost man and woman," she said, "and longing for them to be forgiven. Might we not, at all events, pray for them?"

"Pray that they may be forgiven?" Valerian said. "Surely. Who doubts the pity of the Saviour? Who doubts the power of the Master? Pray to God as much as we will. Yet let none dare to pray the Church to relax her laws. We are a besieged City still, and who dares trust deserters? Who dares weaken her walls?—the only bulwarks left in the world against treachery and selfish ease; the only fortress held in the world for loyalty and fidelity and truth. The King may forgive, but never may we stand side by side with traitors."

"Only," said Viola, "if we had suffered for them, we might stoop down, might we not? Nay, even go, go down to any depth of depths, if only we might get our arms underneath the lost and lift them up?"

"You speak as if treachery and desertion were a disease, and the Lapsed were simply like lepers

or outcasts from bodily corruption; such, of course, we are bound to succour. But this leprosy is in the soul, the soul itself *is* the leprosy in the sacred body of the Church, and we may not tolerate it. Nothing can save such, it seems to me, from their own conscience, save once more to be similarly tried, and *not* to lapse."

"Is the devil, then, the only friend of the lapsed?" said little Viola; "the devil now, and by-and-by, we may hope, the blessed Christ? We might almost pray for a persecution."

"Child! child!" replied the grandmother; "you know not what you say. Ask for persecution! We pray 'lead us *not* into temptation.'"

That night, as the sisters knelt together in their little chamber, the two fallen Christians were commended in their prayers to the All-merciful, and never afterwards were they forgotten; that some day, in some world, the peace of God might be given to those to whom the peace of the Church could not be granted. And a strong spiritual link was formed between the heart of Viola and those fallen ones.

Through them her heart first learned to know

the outside wilderness into which she followed them.

"I see them," she said, "as Hagar and Ishmael, going forth outcast and distressed into the desert. And I think some of the holy angels will surely be sent, that they may not perish of thirst."

CHAPTER VI.

So simply and steadfastly had Clement taken on him the place of the lost parents, that neither he nor any of the family thought it anything strange that his life should be altogether given to the family, and the family make him no further return than to accept his care, rely on it, and prosper on it.

That Clement should care for every one else, and that every one else should care for Valerian, seemed to all the normal and unquestionable order of things. Through Clement the machinery of the little home-state was kept steadily going, but in Valerian the family lived, hoped, went forth into the world and the Church, felt the vibrations of the world and the Church thrill through the home. And the world of that age was a world full of dull echoes of a past whose forms it imitated while unconsciously swayed by quite another spirit; a world where philo-

sophers were trying to polish and explain the old gods into allegories, or into a venerable and shadowy senate, in impotent session under a distant imperial rule. It was not so much a mocking, self-satisfied world with which Valerian came in contact, and sometimes in collision, as an imitative, uneasy, restless, searching world; seeking rest in ancient mysteries and foreign rites, or daintily combining what seemed least contrary to taste and morals in various religions; seeking rest, and sometimes thinking it had found rest, until some real storm came and shattered the real external world on which it had been really resting, and it was found that this dainty religion was not a rock, to build on, but a plaster decoration, flimsier than the human life on which it was laid—an unhappy, over-taxed, insecure, luxurious, impoverished world, which made its gods as it made its emperors, and had as little loyalty to one as to the other.

After his oration he was appointed to an office under the Proconsul, which threw him into varied society. From day to day he brought home tidings of some companion having been severely initiated

into the rites of Mithra, or into the Egyptian mysteries; or of some bereaved family which had invoked by aid of magic the spirits of the dead, and received some glimpse of a light or a darkness beyond, which at the moment seemed to many the opening of a door, but always ended in being but the flitting by of an irrevocable flash.

In this broken world there were still two unities: the unity of Rome, apparently solid still, but secretly undermined in countless directions; and the unity of the Catholic Church, apparently threatened in countless directions, yet destined, being the unity of life in a living Lord, to survive Rome and the world.

Yet the news of the Church which Valerian brought home was more frequently of division and internal conflict than of conquest.

The searching, uneasy spirit of the times was in the Church as well as in the world. The "moon above, the Church below," which look to us from the distance so full-orbed and fair, were scarred then as now with the ruins of many extinct volcanoes,

and lit up with the false glare of many volcanoes far from extinct.

Elements, since crystallized into solid substances distinct from each other, were then seething and arranging themselves in ceaseless revolution and evolution, unnamed, undistinguished, uncomprehended.

And Valerian had that quality of mind, so invaluable, and so perilous, which made him open to all teaching, a reverent readiness to believe that what interested the soul of other men must have in it some Divine element—a generous indisposition to condemn, a warm and generous disposition to hear what the condemned had to say for themselves.

He had a companion, Priscus, in the service of the Proconsulate to which he belonged, who had lately taken to coming frequently to the farm, and spoiling, Viola considered, the dialogues with her brother which were the delight of her life—a man whose brisk, sharp, easy classifications of everything in the Church and the world drove Valerian into still more disinclination to definitions.

Priscus, like Valerian, had a pleasure in studying what other people were thinking; but not at all, like Valerian, with an intention of enlarging or modifying his own thinking, simply as a contribution to his museum of spiritual curiosities.

He delighted to alarm the grandmother with the last subtleties of Gnostic speculation in Alexandria, or the last irregularities of Montanist fervour in Phrygia, and had not the slightest difficulty in determining the spiritual position of any one, shaking his head severely at the latitude of Origen, and contemptuously anathematizing that poor Phrygian prophetess, who, when men had fled from persecution, climbed with bleeding feet across the mountain rocks and snows to bring spiritual succour (in an irregular way) to the forsaken Christians in the hills.

To Priscus the various heretics were like vermin preserved for sport; he liked to know their haunts so as to have them ready at any moment for a spiritual chase.

To Valerian it was never possible to forget that the heretics were men and women, and in some

sense Christians; and therefore he was always impelled to search out the human want or even the Divine truth, neglected perhaps elsewhere, whose exaggeration made the heresy; and in the ante-Nicene period uncondemned heresies, and therefore the latitude for such sympathies, were considerable for the most orthodox.

To Valerian and Viola these visits of Priscus were far from congenial. But the grandmother thought him a very well-instructed young man; he knew everything, from the history of the Roman house to which she had belonged to the last new speculation of the last new Gnostic; and there was a certain mild excitement in contrasting the wild vagaries of these new days with the solid sacrifices of her own youth.

With Clement also Priscus found some favour. Valerian was too much occupied with the heart of things and people to be a good surface newsmonger, and the lively gossip of Priscus brought a good deal of contemporary history to the quiet farm.

So it happened that Clement, always ready to think others his superiors, was much impressed with

his guest's extent of information about the Roman corn-fleets and the politics of the province, and the menaces of the barbarians on the Persian or Dacian frontier, and gave him credit for knowing much about all the many things he himself did not know.

He had also spoken to Clement on the subject of a marriage with his sister Viola, and the prospect of an alliance with a man in a good position in the Church and the world, within reach of her present home, was not a thing lightly to be rejected.

Marriages were, as a matter of course, affairs of family arrangement, and Clement stood in the position of the father of the family; and although he would be sure not to disregard his sister's wishes, there was in him a quiet persistency of purpose, and a quiet reliance on his own convictions, which made the resistance of his own will seem a kind of revolt against a law of nature.

What Clement and the grandmother approved it had hitherto seemed a rebellion to deem impossible.

The aspect of affairs was thus becoming menac-

ing for Viola, until one evening when Priscus took a tour over the farm with Clement. In this walk, anxious to please the young proprietor, he hazarded sundry rhetorical remarks about the culture of vines and figs, which convinced Clement that, whatever else he understood, the culture of vines and figs he did not understand; and the discovery throwing a shadow on his omniscience generally, Clement began to take less heed of his opinions about the Roman empire, and to suspect hollow places elsewhere.

The conclusion of the evening was not less unfortunate for Priscus as regarded the grandmother. On his return to the house, having a dim perception that he had not shone in his observations on farming, he recurred to his natural field, the gossip of the Church of Carthage, and hazarded some sharp criticism of Tertullian and the Montanists, their narrow asceticism, combined with their daring revolt against episcopal authority, counting on the approval of the stately old Roman lady on the ground of rational moderation and of authority.

But to his surprise he found himself confront-

ing a sacred memory on which his polished dissecting knife would not be tolerated for an instant.

He was in full career of a ludicrous description of some Montanist ceremonial in which seven white-veiled women had walked in procession through the assembly, to the music of a wild dirge-like chant of their own, occasionally broken by solemn words of exhortation and promise, which were received by the congregation as inspired prophetic utterances; and with the want of perception of a man accustomed to talk on the smooth, low levels, and occupied far more with his own skill in presenting the subject than with the subject itself, he had not perceived the indignation gathering on the brow and in the dark eyes of the old Roman matron, until suddenly she waved her hand majestically and arrested his narrative.

"I have seen such things in my time," she said; "I have seen Christian women inspired, on the eve of martyrdom, with an eloquence not to be gainsaid. I have yet to learn that the holy Paraclete is limited to sex, or age, or station. The generation which can

sit smiling by the arena whence the martyrs went to heaven may exercise its wit on Tertullian. But I have heard him speak, with a power to which the smooth sermons of these days seem mere babble; free as the Spirit whose presence is liberty, as the Son who makes us free indeed; yet, severe as the Spirit who smote the half-hearted Ananias, and as the Lord who said, 'If any man will follow Me let him take up the Cross.' I have heard him appeal from all sophisticated souls in the Church and out of it, to the testimony in the depths of every true soul, for God and Christianity. He believed in the godlike capacities of men and of women: he believed in the Spirit of God. When he apologised for Christianity, his defence became an assault on the enemy, and they fled beyond their own defences; nay, many of them fled to ours, convicted by their own consciences. He believed in God, and in man, and in woman; and in marriage, as few do now, or ever did. He so believed in the immortal union of true Christian marriage as to regard second marriage as a sacrilege. And," she concluded, "I have always thought him right."

Priscus started, and, colouring crimson, made a stammering reply.

"I did not know the report of my marriage in Rome had reached Carthage," he said. "It lasted but six months; she was but a child, and I buried her with all honour."

"I did not know you had been married," the grandmother replied. "What was that to me? I was not thinking of you, but of Tertullian."

After that evening, to the great relief of Viola, it was some weeks before Priscus reappeared. Clement's belief in him had been rudely shaken; and the grandmother changed her formula about him, from "He is as wise as many of twice his years," to "People who are as wise at twenty as they might be at seventy are apt to have learnt no more at seventy than they knew at twenty."

The attack on the hero of her youth had greatly aroused her; and now once more, out of the multitude of small controversies and the crowd of lower men, one great form began to detach itself from the rest in the Church of Carthage.

Cyprian, only two years after his conversion and

baptism, in the full vigour of his life, though already past the prime of his age, had been elected bishop by the voice of the people. Some of the presbyters resisted his appointment, but the laity had discovered the true ruler, and on their choice, with the consent of the other bishops of the province, as involving the "judgment of God" and the "aspiration of God," he relied.

From him Valerian brought home wise words, fervent exhortations against the luxury of the laity and the clergy, the degradation of the presbyters and bishops to pursuits of trade and money-making, the misery of the pauperised multitudes, the corruptions of the theatre, which recalled to the grandmother the great memory of her youth.

"They are alike!" she said; "austere and ardent, free and ascetic. I recognise the old voice once more."

Cyprian sold his gardens to have the means of succouring the poor, but they were purchased back for him by some of his flock. And from those breezy gardens near the coast, from the "bower, where the trailing vine-branches crept in pendent mazes among

the reeds that supported them, near the thickets" of roses and jessamines, came words of lofty Christian enthusiasm, inspiring the hearts of the young and reviving the old.

He spoke of the new life he had felt infused into him. "I used to indulge my sins," he said, "as if they were indigenous and actually parts of me; but after that, by the help of the water of the new birth, the stain of former years had been washed away, and a light from above, serene and pure, had been infused into my reconciled heart; after that, by the agency of the Spirit breathed from heaven, a second birth had restored me to a new man; then in a wondrous manner doubtful things at once began to assure themselves to me, hidden things to be revealed, dark things to be enlightened, what had before been thought impossible to be capable of being achieved.

"The Spirit flowing freely forth is restrained by no limits, is checked by no closed barriers within certain bounded spaces; it flows perpetually. Let our hearts only be athirst and be ready to receive, in the degree in which we bring to it a capacious

faith, in that measure we draw from it an overflowing grace."

He spoke of the unspeakable corruption of the arena, and as strongly of the despicable poverty of the covetous rich. "Such people call that their own money," he said, "which they shut up unused, as if it were another's, *in which their only possession is that they keep others from possessing it.*"

In contrast, "Man's true elevation is a gratuitous gift from God, and is accessible to all. As the sun shines spontaneously, as the fountain flows, as the showers yield moisture, so does the heavenly Spirit infuse itself. When the soul, in its gaze into heaven, has recognised its Author, it rises higher than the sun, and *begins to be what it believes itself to be.*"

"Do you, however," he said, "whom the celestial warfare has enlisted in the spiritual camp, only observe a discipline uncorrupted. Be constant in prayer as well as in reading; now speak with God, now let Him speak with you. Whom He has made rich none shall make poor."

"It is the old voice!" the grandmother said, the

tears filling her eyes. "Thank God I hear it again before I die."

"Yet the Bishop is no Montanist," said Valerian; "although every day, they say, he calls for 'the master,' and will not sleep without being strengthened by some of the strong words of Tertullian."

"See, my children," the matron answered, "how the blessed voices carry on the message. Our Lord will never let the Church live on echoes. Just as the last great voice seems dying away afar in faint and broken echoes, from the next height rings the new voice of this new prince with God."

"And yet, mother, the words are not altogether the same. Tertullian was for the public ministry of women, and had little reverence for the episcopate if it crossed him. Cyprian would not have women take any public office; and he says, 'The bishop is in the Church and the Church is in the bishop.' If Tertullian had lived twenty years longer, and these two had met, would they have borne with each other?"

"How do I know?" she said, with a little irrita-

tion. "God did not suffer them to meet. One such voice is enough in one age."

And from that time, from the little treasury of Christian manuscripts which was stored up in its carved case in the grandmother's room, from among the Gospels and Epistles, the brief burning words of the Epistle to Diognetus, the martyrdom of Polycarp, the acts of the martyrs of Vienne and of Carthage, the wise fervent sentences of Irenæus, oftener than before, the aged matron desired Justa or Viola to take out the well-worn parchments of Tertullian; and late into the night, by the light of the little lamp of translucent giallo, the rugged, living words were read by the fresh young voice to the ears that had heard the voice of "the master" himself of old.

"Old world prayer indeed," he wrote, "used to free men from fires and beasts and famine. But how far more operative is Christian prayer! *It does not station the angel of dew in mid-fires nor muzzle lions; it has no delegated grace to avert any sense of suffering; but it supplies the suffering with endurance.*

"For this community—the Church—will be undying; for be assured that just in the time of its seeming overthrow it is built up into greater power."

"Thank God for the new wine; it is of the old vine!" she would sometimes say. "And yet the old is better!"



CHAPTER VII.

So these last months of the thirty years' peace passed on at Carthage; Clement pursuing his quiet way, Valerian vibrating between the attraction to all that is beautiful in Pagan thought and art and the attraction of that "more than commonplace holiness" which said, with Tertullian, "What have we to do with *finding* in this world, we whose business in this world is to *lose*?"

More and more the grave fervour of Cyprian commanded him, that fervour which was no mere flame of youth, but the steady red heat of a rich nature, which, having found its Lord late, heaped up all the accumulated stores of youth and manhood and ripened age in the fire of Christian sacrifice; the profound passion of a heart enkindled late, and having the wealth of a lifetime to lavish in its few last hours.

Before all things, however, Cyprian was the

bishop, the shepherd of the flock. This was what he believed the Great Shepherd had given him to be and to do; to find, to lead, to rule, to increase, to restrain, to encourage the flock; to live and die for them.

Never married, to him the Church of Carthage was family, country, life. Its confessors were his glory, its lapsed his anguish, its worldly languid members his wonder and shame.

He did not so much identify them with himself as identify himself with them.

Seeing the lukewarmness which peace had brought, often he almost longed for some sharp lessons from without. And, dreading or longing, he prophesied that ere long such would come.

As yet, however, no symptom of the coming storm was in the air; and early in the year, Valerian, partly on family business connected with the farm and partly on ecclesiastical business, but chiefly swayed by his own longing to see what place the Church really held throughout the Roman world, and whether the divisions and perplexities of Carthage were reproduced elsewhere, set forth on a

journey of some months to Alexandria, to Smyrna, to Lyons, and to Rome.

The days passed heavily for Viola when Valerian had gone. Between these two there had always been an inner kindred which had more than doubled the world to both. The ties between the whole family were peculiarly close and true, but with these two there was the intimacy of friendship. Together everything for them rose into its highest meanings, and many questionings of conscience came to Viola as to the difference in her enjoyment of the sacred services and writings without her brother.

To all it was like losing the music of the home to lose him. His connection with the great city and the empire was the Roman road on which their unvaried lives travelled into the wide world. His presence, with all the aspirations and questionings it brought, was also a Via Sacra into the higher world. And the loss was not lightened by the fact that Priscus began to renew his visits.

Viola, at all events, would have preferred hearing nothing of Carthage and the empire and the Church, to having everything brought to them through

the diminishing glass of that small, self-satisfied, busy, buzzing mind.

The world had grown small and dull enough by the mere absence of Valerian, she thought, without having Cyprian represented as a partisan in a small ecclesiastical strife with the recusant presbyters, and the whole Church pictured as an arena of petty conflicts and selfish aims and party factions.

Had the great Lord become incarnate and died, had the blessed martyrs agonized and triumphed only for this—that the world might have another world created within it, noisy with the quarrels of bishops and presbyters, and tainted with gossip about the imprudences of light-minded deacons and the enormous fortunes made in trade by covetous bishops?

One evening, however, a gift came to the family which changed all this.

It was a stormy autumnal evening. The vintage was over. The grandmother and the sisters were sitting by the charcoal brazier spinning and embroidering, unconsciously silenced by the tumult outside the house. The wet branches of the trailing

vines were beating disconsolately against the walls. The voice of the rainy winds sounded in every tone of autumnal moan and wail through the groves of beech and pine; and when these died away, the ceaseless dash of the waves against the cliffs filled up the pauses.

At length Viola grew too uneasy to remain quiet. The sea had a terrible fascination for her since Valerian had left, and she never knew at any moment how the storms might be endangering him. She went, therefore, to the little flax chamber in the roof to fetch fresh flax for the winter spinning; and once there the temptation to mount to the flat roof and see what was going on in the triangle of sea visible between the rocks which closed the valley was too strong to be resisted.

Stormy gleams of moonlight broke at intervals through the black clouds, and in one of these she caught sight of a vessel, apparently drifting helplessly on the rocks.

Assistance to the ship in her struggle with the winds and waves they had none to render.

The life and death of the Son of Man, who

loved all men, whose love for humanity has been reflected in so many who as yet disown Him, had to work through many centuries yet before it created lifeboats; and working, as ever, slowly, not by direct precepts, but through the enkindled hearts and lives of men, inspiring everywhere the spirit of rescue for every form of human need and sorrow, as yet on the shores of Carthage it had only worked so far outwards as to set this Christian family on the watch, whenever a wreck occurred, to see that no wrong was done to the wrecked, in life or property.

It was a custom in the household, therefore, whenever a ship was espied in peril, to gather all the slaves together and be ready to render succour to any who were tossed on any point of rock or beach within their reach, and if possible to restore life and to guard property.

Viola lost not a moment in rushing down to find Clement and tell him of the peril, her steps and her heart doubtless quickened by the thought of the possible peril elsewhere to the life dearer to her than her own.

But the quick omnipresent eyes of the master

had been before her. Clement had already collected two or three of the household and was on his way to the beach, leaving Viola to arrange the woman's part of the work in collecting clothing, and having the braziers ready to bring back life to benumbed limbs.

It was not long before the sisters, listening at the door to the tempest rising higher and higher, as if with shrieks and roars of superhuman voices, were appalled by one prolonged shrill human cry, terribly clear above the wail of the winds or the hoarse surging of the waves.

"God heard that, sister!" said Viola, "and He will hear us!" and instinctively they knelt down in the porch, their arms around each other, and prayed. A long interval followed. The storm seemed to lull, as if it had won its battle and done its work. And no second appeal from human voices broke the dull sullen beat of the tempest. The unnatural screams and moans, as of embittered conscious beings raging and wailing, seemed to die away.

"How strange it is!" Viola murmured; "the winds and waves seem as if they were *energoumenoi*,

possessed by demons, and had been exorcised, and were crouching exhausted and moaning as the exorcised do before the altar. I have a strange feeling, sister, as if the demons had been baffled and made to give up some prey." The words were still on her lips, when a slave came running breathlessly to the house.

"A rescue! a young girl saved! The master is bringing her. He has sent to have all things ready." And in a few minutes Clement appeared bearing in his arms a slight form wrapped in his own mantle. He carried the unconscious child into the house and laid her tenderly on the couch, beside the brazier, among the women.

"Let no one touch her but you," he said to his sisters.

His tone was as if he had been speaking of something sacred, and, slight as the burden was, his strength seemed spent with bearing it.

Viola saw that he was very pale and his brow was bleeding, and would have left everything to bind up the wound; but he refused help, saying it was nothing, and left the women alone together.

So she came to them, Eucharis, the joy and light, the anguish and bliss of so many in the household, set for the fall and rising again of many, the fall and rising again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WONDERFUL delight it was to the sisters to see the ashy pallor pass from the face, to watch the faint flush of life dawn on the beautiful curves of the cheek and lips and the first quiver in the heavy blue-veined eyelids, and then at last to see the long fringes of the dark lashes languidly rise and reveal for a moment the dark soft eyes. For a moment, a sacred moment, it seemed to Viola, and certainly not less to Clement, who had ventured in to watch for tidings.

A sacred moment, he felt; for those eyes were windows into the unknown heart and soul, and there must be no surprising the secret treasures hidden there; so, reverently, he turned away.

It was but a moment; the heavy eyelids closed again, a quiver passed through all the frame, and it was long before they opened once more.

But when they did open, it was no more merely

the eyelids which seemed to lift themselves automatically; the human soul consciously and deliberately raised them, and fixed a long, searching, wistful gaze on Viola, who had been left alone with her, as more of her own age and less likely to bewilder her waking.

In a few moments the questioning gaze melted, as if she had found an answer.

Viola lifted up her eyes to God as she knelt beside the couch, and half unconsciously made the sign of the cross.

And then, suddenly, a smile, which was the most radiant illumination Viola had ever seen glorify a human face, lit up the lucid eyes, the mouth, the smooth broad brow, and seemed to give colour to the cheeks. Eucharis stretched out her arms, Viola bent towards her, and the hearts of the Christian maidens met in one first long kiss of peace.

That was all. Then the stranger fell asleep, her head resting on Viola's shoulder, and Viola made her first delicious, willing sacrifice to this new sister, holding her hour after hour with unwearied heart in strained and wearied arms.

It was dawn before she woke again, and by that time Viola had dropped into an easier posture, and had fallen into a happy sleep of exhaustion herself; but a slight movement of the stranger, in waking, at once awoke her, and then for the first time she heard the sound of the deep, clear voice. She spoke Latin, but the accent was foreign.

"I understand it all now," she said. "Am I alone? Are none saved but me?"

"There was one bound with you to a plank—an aged woman—but she could not be brought back to life."

"My faithful Rhoda!" she said, "thou art gone to life, to Paradise, to the Christ thou hast made me love! Thou hast left thy child, thy Eucharis, for the first time,—for the last." And then came a burst of healing tears.

She was an orphan, a Greek, one of those Greek families who constituted so large a part of the early Church of Rome.

Her mother had been dead many years, her father some months, and the faithful old nurse was taking her to some relations at Alexandria, as her

only natural kindred; but with little knowledge of what reception they might give her.

And so it came about that, without debate or dispute, Eucharis, this pearl from the sea, was enshrined as another child in the Carthaginian home, and took her place at the distaff, in the garden, in the readings to the grandmother, at the family hymns, and the sacred services of the Church.

Quietly nestling down into the home and into the hearts of all, as if familiar to all from infancy; yet to each coming in quite an especial way, as just the creature each needed to make the life complete, and also revealing each to each in countless new and happy lights unperceived before.

To the grandmother she brought the perfume of old Rome, of the culture and grandeur of her early days, and drew from her stories of old times, new to her grandchildren. To Justa she brought all kinds of tender helpful ways, learned from caring for her aged nurse; a sense of one present by whom suffering was always understood, and therefore never dragged into light—little silent kindnesses and soothing touches, and tears understood only by the suf-

ferer. To Viola she brought Greece, and poetry, and music, and nature, a glorified world, a higher heaven, a precious casket for all her treasures of recollection of Valerian.

To Clement she brought he knew not yet what; something that made the old labours not only light but full of unutterable new hope and meaning, which made him, for the first time, feel conscious he had a life of his own—not only a foundation and stay for other lives, which had been good and blessed, but a whole unexplored world within of infinite possibilities.

But as yet he had not said this to himself. So unused to ask anything for himself, his only conscious thought was of giving, and still giving, sacrificing, succouring. But then this giving was an infinite receiving, a drinking in of new life with every nerve, an expansion of every power. And Eucharis herself? Sister, daughter, for the first time she had sisters, a mother, a brother, perhaps two brothers, and she wanted nothing more. Except, perhaps, to see that second brother, of whom Viola spoke so much.

In him, as in Viola, there seemed something more than merely Roman, noble and good as these Roman Christians were—something Greek.

And his letters from Smyrna, from Corinth, seemed to be a breath from the beautiful old world, as well as from the holy and beautiful new Christian world.

Soon they expected a letter from Rome.

CHAPTER IX.

"ONE, one throughout the world!" Valerian wrote at last from Rome: "one body, one Head, one life. Not one as Rome is one, bound together by iron bands from without; one by a common life from above. And yet in this unity endless diversity; in this fixedness a ceaseless flow.

"It is life, *dilectissimi*, life, which unites the Catholic Church throughout the world; life with its biography, its changes, its growth, its excrescences, its diseases. By the very nature of life incapable of being monotonously alike in all places and periods; by the very nature of life incapable of departing from its One Divine type; as certain that no branch, no leaf, no cluster of its rich grapes will be precisely the same in outline, in colour, in number, or in size, as it is certain that all its leaves and fruit and branches will be vine branches, vine leaves, and grapes, and nothing else.

"One King over all the kingdom, beloved; one Father for all the family; one love through all the children.

"And one enemy, a very subtle enemy, ready with his appropriate weapons for every climate and every season, his locusts to devastate, his canker-worms silently to eat away, his mildews and his droughts and his frosts.

"It gives a glorious sense of the reality of the warfare, as well as of the reality and multitude of the spiritual army, thus to traverse the world.

"Everywhere welcomes have been given me as among kindred. Yet I must also say, in every place where I have stayed long enough I find differences and controversies, as at our Carthage, though ranging round various points. At Alexandria the teaching of the great layman, the Catechist Origen, master of the great Catechetical Christian School of Alexandria, has left its mark; for it was as a layman he taught at Alexandria, gathered heathen into the Church, within the sacred boundaries of the Church opened glimpses into worlds wider than any of the Pagan philosophers knew.

"I would have given much to hear that eloquent voice, but it is silenced at Alexandria for ever. Bishop Demetrius resented his preaching as a layman in the churches in Syria, although he had taught as a layman in Alexandria, and the Syrian bishops declared that such use of wise laymen had been customary in their churches from time immemorial.

"To remove the difficulty of lay-preaching, Origen was ordained presbyter in Syria, but this only increased the indignation of Bishop Demetrius, and now Origen is banished from Alexandria, and has even been excommunicated.

"Meantime he works on, it is said, with 'adaman-tine' unwearied force, and the tradition of his teaching remains here.

"He has kept nobly poor all his life. But he came of a noble race. His father was martyred.

"Origen, then a young boy, wrote him in prison, 'See that thou change not thy mind for our sakes.'

"His mother had hidden the child's clothes lest he should give himself up to martyrdom.

"The father was beheaded, and the mother left destitute with six children.

"Quite in his youth he had learned so much that he maintained himself by teaching rhetoric and grammar. But he very soon resolved to devote all his intellectual powers to Christianity; he resigned the Grammatical chair which had been his maintenance, sold his books, and lived for years on four oboli a day from the money they made.

"He has devoted himself much to the study of the Holy Scriptures, hunting out manuscripts and collecting and collating them. Great men and women in the empire have sought to learn of him; the empress mother, Mammæa, sent to converse with him,—the mother of Alexander Severus. He has made journeys to Syria, to Arabia, to Greece, to Rome, and now, between sixty and seventy, he is working as hard as ever at Cæsarea in Palestine.

"The Holy Scriptures he considers as an unfathomable mine of Divine Wisdom, in which we must expect to find difficulties, as in the Divine works in nature.

"But one saying reported to me perplexed me:

‘Happy are they who have advanced so far as no longer to need the Son of God as the Physician that heals the sick, no longer as the Shepherd, no longer as the Redemption; but who need Him only as the Truth, the Word, the Sanctification, or in whatever other relation He stands to those whose perfect manhood enables them to comprehend what is most glorious in Him.’

“Surely in this the true meaning and proportion of his words have been missed. Surely the child lives on in the man. The Shepherd leads not only by the still waters and the ravines of death here, but by the living fountains for ever: on the throne He is the Lamb as it had been slain.

“Let me hear Thee more and more as the glorious Word; but oh let me find Thee, never let me lose Thee, as the Shepherd of the lambs!

“This Alexandrian school, beloved, stands at the opposite extreme from North Africa: wide in hope for all men, penetrating into depths we have never dreamt of in the Sacred Writings, finding threefold mystical interpretations where we scarcely blunder out one clear literal meaning. We seem but to be

children beside these wise ones. And yet, and yet, I think these wise ones need the children; the Church at all events needs and has all, for she is a flock and a kingdom, not a mere theosophic school.

"Then in Phrygia the conflicts are of another kind. There, in the native country of wild Bacchantes and pagan phrenzies, the birthplace of our Tertullian's Montanism, the ecstatic trances and the prophetic inspiration of women still go on, but for the most part now distinctly outside the Church.

"And here at Rome the combat seems to be, in Roman fashion, chiefly for matters of government, for the authority of the bishop, for a strong organization, compact and forcible enough to confront the world here in the centre of its might.

"Everywhere, indeed, I think the rule and government are becoming stricter. Sometimes it looks to me like a garrison being unconsciously compacted and organized for a siege and an assault; for, tranquil as the world is just now for us, I often remember the fears of our Bishop Cyprian. Behind so slight a grating everywhere the evil beasts who might be set on us seem to be confined! For the

world is very unhappy, beloved, without hope, or patriotism, or loyalty, knowing little of its rulers except their taxes. And many hate us; the poorer pagans frankly and fiercely, as enemies of the gods, whenever a pestilence or a famine comes, and they see the multitudes we have withdrawn from propitiating the gods; the philosophers mildly but determinedly, as superstitious enemies of the unity and sole dominance of the State.

“And who can say when the old rage against us may be let loose?

“In every church there are graves of martyrs, or the more sacred cenotaphs of the burned and devoured. And these, after all, are the sacred hearths where our hearts draw most closely together.

“In Smyrna, at Alexandria, at Tyre, at Lyons, and Vienne, and here in Rome, I have talked with aged men and women who, like our grandmother, have witnessed the dying agonies of the confessors.

“And these—Greek, Alexandrian, Gaulish, Latin, Phrygian, Jew; philosophers, advocates for the freedom of speech, firmest adherents to the rights of the episcopate,—died, not for philosophy, or the

doctrine of the Paraclete, or for the episcopate, but for One, for One only, the Holy One, in whom the whole Catholic Church is one, the Christ, the Saviour, the Son of Man, and Son of God."

In other letters he spoke of the places he saw: the low shores of sandy Alexandria; the rich valley of Nablous (Shechem), where Justin Martyr had lived, and the woman of Samaria; the coasts of the Mediterranean, African, Asiatic, European, fringed everywhere with busy merchant-cities, and every city the seat of a Christian Church and bishopric.

"Wonderful and divine it is," he said, "to find this one heavenly language everywhere, this one Name, scarcely known two hundred years ago, finding me a home and kindred in mountain villages in Phrygia, in old Greek cities, on island and mainland, in new colonies on the rivers of far-off Gaul.

"Yet for the most part there are only three languages in use among us; indeed, there are chiefly two. It was a Greek colony which planted the Church in Lyons; and when any of the natives around become Christian they naturally adopt the

language of the two great civilised races, as a step to civilisation.

“For Christians cannot remain barbarians.

“What will be done with these Goths pouring in on all sides upon us, we know not yet. Some say this river flows from sources which are inexhaustible, and that the Church will have to heal these bitter waters, which the empire cannot turn, nor stem, nor drain away.

“Once on the outer limits of Dacia I came on one of these Gothic camps,—a village it professed to be; but their normal condition is warfare, and their normal community is a camp.

“Like us, beloved, like the Church! We also, if we cease to be a camp at war with evil, soon cease to be a city at unity in itself.

“And sometimes I think we may be called to go forth, camp against camp, the hosts of God against these Gothic hosts.

“For verily they are *men*, these Goths, not slaves or womanish idlers, but men every one of them, from the chief to the lowest.

“And where men are most men, there, I think,

Christ the Son of Man might be best followed and the future of the world best worked out.

"All things else seem old and more like oft-repeated echoes,—the new philosophies are echoes of the old, Latin poetry is an echo of the Greek, the new Greek but a fainter echo still.

"But the Church is young, Christianity is a living voice, and these Goths are young. And sometimes I think I should like best of all things to renounce all earthly joys and fame, and go forth, poor and unarmed, like the first seventy, among these barbarians, to live and die for them, and win them for the Church and the Christ."

"Valerian among the barbarians!" said Viola. "Banished from us for ever among the wild hordes!"

But Eucharis said, "I have often thought of it. My faithful nurse was a Gothic slave, and through her I learned to think that we, even Christians, make the world too small. Often and often, when I hear of these barbarians, as it were battering against the gates of the empire on all sides, I think, 'Poor lost children of men, outside in the darkness and the cold! they are beating their wings like birds on

winter nights against our lighted homes. Let us rise up and welcome them in, and teach them, and make them children of God.'"

"But Valerian! that Valerian should be banished from us for ever into that darkness!" said Viola; "he is capable of it!" and her eyes filled with tears. "But of course you do not know him, nor what the world would be for us without him."

"You might go together," said Eucharis; "the first seventy were sent out two and two."

CHAPTER X.

THE days glided on in happy tranquillity, in the midst of active country work, lit up by that hope of something beyond which, consciously or unconsciously, is essential to the happiness of our happiest days.

For Valerian was coming home. Any day any of the ships which came in daily from Italy might bring him. Any evening his step might surprise them on the threshold. All the little country festivals of the home-life were delayed as long as possible in the hope that he might share them. All the work about the farm was pressed onward to completion that he might see everything finished and ready.

This was the hope they all spoke of, but underneath, to Clement, another hope was slowly ripening which he did not speak of to any one, although he had become aware that to him it had changed the light of his life from a sober working daylight into a conscious *sunshine*, giving vivid light and shadow

to every common stone or blade of grass—vivid, yet tranquil as his own nature, as the healthy country life they lived.

For the farm was no luxurious villa, with its little court of fastidious patricians, or lavish wealthy freedmen, revellers crowned and garlanded, supported on the monotonous, hopeless toil of a legion of slaves. It was a place of wholesome, tiring, fruitful work for every member of the household.

Nature was to this Christian family no slave ministering to their luxury. She was a fellow-servant of the one Master, whom they were daily assisting to be liberated from their foes and hers, and to be her highest, most beautiful and best.

No meek manageable creature, indeed, was she, this North African Nature, only a little sluggish or a little wayward, needing here a gentle stirring up to activity, and there a gentle check; no quiet easy beast of burden, as in our sober north, whose worst danger was that she might do nothing. A powerful, wilful, reckless, impetuous Titan, able to lift up all the load humanity could lay upon her, lightly as the *sea lifts up a skiff*, easily as an elephant would carry

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she should spin flax. The same delicate finish, the same capability were there.

Everything came from her fingers, orderly, and finished, and right.

Not that he said anything of this to her or to himself. He only loved to watch, in silence, the deft movements, and to notice her brief fitting words, or to distinguish the music of her low ringing laughter from all other sounds.

In the evening it had become a custom that the sisters went to the field or the garden where the chief work of the day had gone on, and Clement had found in Eucharis an interested learner and listener whose sympathy in the daily narratives of the daily toil made it all a poem.

She said it was as good as an old Greek legend to hear of his labours and conquests. Every irrigating channel in the carefully watered gardens, every cistern where the precious waters were stored, every repaired terrace and levelled field, became as familiar to her as to him.

When they came back, sometimes, she sang to them Greek songs, or strange wild melodies she had

learned from her Gothic nurse; or sometimes the grandmother liked to hear the sweet foreign accent giving out the rugged powerful words of her great Tertullian; and that, Clement thought, was like a nymph leading a lion, by laying her soft hand on his mane.

And so, gradually, the gentle presence crept like sunlight into every corner of his heart, and he woke up and knew he loved her.

Still his thoughts flowed in the old habitual channels. He did not so much question whether she loved him, as feel sure he would shelter and guard her. He thought of his love as of wings enfolding her, keeping her from all cold and harm for ever, and of her resting in it. He scarcely wanted as yet to know her feeling; he had had no reason to think she loved him, except as one of them all; but he thought it would all come naturally to her, as the love of her had come to him. It would grow silently, tranquilly, to be a part of her being, as of his, as his life had grown, as all natural things grow.

And he would not hurry any stage of that blessed growth, any more than he could or would hurry

a rosebud to unfold or a golden spike of maize to ripen. If he had learned anything from nature, he had learned patience, and surely in this crowning hour of life would be its crowning triumph.

So all things went tranquilly on, until one evening, after the hymn at the lighting of the lamps, Eucharis was singing to them with her lute a wild dirge, which her mother, a Chian, had sung to her as a child, which she had intertwined with a strain of immortal hope.

SWEET IS THE LIGHT.

I.

“ ‘Sweet is the light!’ they sang,
First Singers of our race—
‘On each familiar thing,
On each beloved face!
The mighty, conquering light,
Arrowy, keen, and strong!
The dear, familiar light,
Waking the world to song!
Light on the purple seas—
Light in the golden sky;
Sweet is the light!’ they sang;
‘And therefore dire to die!’ ”

II.

“ ‘To die! and leave the light,
Shadows among the glooms,
Groping ’mid ghosts of joys
For dawn that never comes;

Far from all homely things,
And all familiar ways;
Whilst o'er us, morn by morn,
Still shine the old glad rays,
Waking the fresh green earth
With songs to greet the sky;
Sweet is the light! they sang;
'And therefore dire to die!'

III.

" 'Sweet is the light—all light,
O Fount of light!' we sing,
'On each beloved face,
On each familiar thing!
Thy mighty, probing light,
Keen to part right from wrong!
Thy dear, familiar light,
Waking Thy worlds to song!
Light on Thy crystal sea—
Light in Thy sapphire sky;
Sweet is the light!' we sing;
'And therefore sweet to die!'

IV.

" 'To die! and find the light,
And never lose it more;
Light on life's troubled waves,
Where much was dark before—
The little stormy course
Which tossed us to Thy shore;
Light on the ceaseless storms
Wherein our race is whirled—
The blindness, battles, sins,
And chaos of the world;
Light on Thy countless worlds,
The order through the strife,
The Life that moves the Law,
The Love that moves the Life.
Thy mighty conquering light,
Life-giving, keen, and strong!

Thy kind, familiar light,
Proved step by step so long!
Light in the Father's House,
Holy and homelike glow—
The Home where, one by one,
Our best and dearest go.
Sweet is the light! we sing;
O Light, in Whom we see!
No darkness waiteth us—
No darkness is in Thee.
Sweet is the light, we sing,
Where Thou art known, on high!
Not darkly—Face to face:
Sweet, therefore, sweet to die! "

The rich voice gathered strength as she sang on. They were sitting in a bower of vines close to the house.

All the faces of the little family were turned to her, and all were absorbed, as she was, in the singing, when, at the last lines, Clement saw a sudden light irradiate her eyes, and a flush passed over her face, and then the long lashes drooped and the rich voice dropped into tones low and soft as a dream, until the last words seemed to come from afar, as if from another spirit embracing and echoing her own tones.

And then, when they turned to look at what seemed to have moved the singer, they saw Valerian

standing in an attitude of rapt listening outside in moonlight.

There was a rush of joyous welcome.

Why did Clement feel it as a shock of cold, rather than, like all the rest, as a flash of light?

No one loved Valerian better than he did.

Why did his eyes perpetually wander with a solicitous questioning to Eucharis, and never meet her eyes?

Her eyes did not seem to rest on any one that evening. A veil seemed to have fallen over her, a gossamer veil, transparent as a light mist, but impenetrable; such a mist as that in which the goddesses and the nymphs in the old legends were wont to vanish from human sight.

CHAPTER XL

AND so it was that they found each other, these two, and an impenetrable veil had, indeed, fallen between Eucharis and all the world, but a veil which enfolded not herself alone.

To her it was but the coming into light of the being Viola had taught her to know so well. To him it was the coming into life of all the goodness and loveliness he had ever dreamed. Sudden it seemed to others; not to them. Only sudden; as all blossoming or gathering is sudden; the moment was but the inevitable momentary result of all the life and growth that had gone before.

All the previous life they had been unconsciously lacking only each other, had unconsciously been making ready for each other. Mysterious, inevitable embrace of hearts which had always been related, which could no more fail to make one harmony

when they met, than two voices attuned which have been learning apart two parts of one song.

To Eucharis and Valerian this great love came quite simply and frankly.

On every range of their being they met, in each accidental momentary touch of the hand which, representing as it did the constant enfolding of heart in heart, was a thrill of joy, in the mental travelling to all the far-off places and races which became near to them through their nearness to each other; in the old Greek poetry which lived for them with intense life through the overflow of their own.

Viola listened and wondered, and loved them both enough to delight in their happiness.

Every season seemed to coexist for them in this paradise of their affection. The flowers and trees, the little dancing waves on the sandy shore, the very shells and pebbles, were familiar and precious to them as when they were children, in this singing, and dancing, and blossoming of their hearts.

Childhood with its exuberant simplicity of joy seemed theirs, and yet a sudden ripening of comprehension, as if they had learned the secret of the

language of all creatures, and had glimpses of fresh meanings in the world, such as are otherwise opened by the still air of age or death.

And Clement saw, and bowed, and renounced, and thanked God that no one knew his anguish. He saw the gentle, tranquil being he had loved, and could, he felt, have shielded and cherished well, suddenly, as it were, endued with wings, and belonging to another element. He saw her soar out of that quiet world where he felt they might have been so blessed, and rise into the sunshine and free air. And he saw she was at home there, and though his whole true heart went after her in one long yearning which he felt would never be stilled, he would not, for the world, have stretched out arms or uttered a cry to draw her back.

The sweet, deft, homely, household ways which had so won him were always there; she was as helpful to him, as interested in all his work, as ever, he felt, with a kind of pain. He had nothing to reproach her with; she had in no way changed to him since Valerian came; she was even kinder, franker, more considerate of all his plans and wishes.

He fell back on the long habit of his life, the blessed habit of living for others.

Only once or twice his self-control seemed to fail him, when Valerian, in the delight of some work or ramble together, let her be wearied and did not seem to see it.

Clement had never suffered her to do the least thing on his account that could be a difficulty or pain to her. And yet he knew too well that toil for Valerian was sweeter to her than any care to save her toil from him.

She wrote beautiful Greek characters, clear and firm, as many ladies did in those days; and one evening she came down, pale and with weary eyes, with a delicately finished manuscript in her hand.

Clement felt his indignation rise at the easy courtesy with which Valerian received it from her. He knew indeed that a smile between those two was a volume of thanks. But he had to struggle hard against what seemed a revelation of selfishness in his brother. It flashed on him how they had always contributed to make Valerian the centre; and now, could it be possible that he might take this priceless

creature's love as but one more jewel to enrich his treasury?

That lurid flash seemed to dart back over the whole past life. What had Valerian done for the family, for others? What had he ever done except what he liked to do? And was this the character and the training to make him worthy to shield and cherish that loving, tender being, whose life was so ready to be poured out in sacrifice and service for all? That night the conflict with himself came to its climax.

So easy he felt it would be for the enemy to gain access to the very citadel by that path, that at that point, with all the force of his will, he set himself to make the defences stronger. Jealousy, hatred even of his brother, cruel insight into his worst, cruel misapprehension of his best, might enter at that gate, and (so God help him) they never should. For if Valerian had been self-centred, if the worst were true, *now* at all events he loved; and love—the constant, tried love of married life—would be the surest melting and opening of his heart. Clement resolved that night that the sooner

the consecration of Christian marriage gathered this love up into itself, and the every-day details of mutual help and sacrifice, and the joys and cares of home-life clustered around it, the sooner would all its hallowing depths be unsealed to Valerian.

Down for ever from his visions of a bliss of his own he came to the old life-long quiet work of caring for all.

The next day the betrothal was arranged and the marriage was fixed.

And every one thought it a marvellous self-sacrifice that Clement insisted on giving up the best part of the house he had raised from its ruins to Valerian and his bride, and going to live apart in a little cottage among his vineyards.

But Clement knew that the sacrifice was not there.

CHAPTER XII.

THEY were married in the little chapel in the catacombs, on the Natalitia of Perpetua and Felicitas.

The garlands and hymns, and all the festive commemoration of the martyrs seemed to enfold them with love and promise.

"It seems," Eucharis said to Justa and Viola, as they were arranging her simple white bridal robe, "as if the Church is to us as our mother, we whose mothers and fathers have been taken to her rest above. She gathers us to her bosom and stretches her arms around us, and breathes her benediction over us to-day. I feel as if soft motherly dove's wings were all around me. 'The Jerusalem, the heavenly, which is free, which is the mother of us all!'"

They had purposely chosen this day. They felt it good that their joy should be blended with the festivity of all.

Eucharis had especially gathered to her heart those young Carthaginian martyr-mothers.

They came to her in dreams, she said, and she often woke as if she still felt the soft touch of Perpetua's hand on her brow, as it had rested on the dying Felicitas in the arena, and she almost seemed to see the radiant forms floating back into heaven, with another, her own mother, who had left her so long ago.

As they left the cool shade of the little chapel together, Valerian and his bride, once more the two crouching forms of the lapsed husband and wife met his eyes, half hidden as before in the shadow of the rock.

The mournful sight smote on him like an icy touch, so that it seemed coming out from the coolness of the rock-chapel, not to the glow of the African sun, but to night, and ice, and death.

He glanced hastily at Eucharis, hoping she had not seen, but he saw that her eyes, unconsciously following his, were opened wide with horror, and riveted on the worn downcast faces and the dark penitential robes.

She seemed to comprehend it all at once. Viola had often spoken to her of those two, and she, with the milder discipline and freer hopes of her native Church of Rome, had often said she would like to meet them and say some words of love and comfort to them.

And now, seeing them for the first time, in contrast with her own and Valerian's life of joy, all other emotions gathered and flowed forth in one strong irrepressible tide of pity.

With a gentle force which he could not resist, she drew Valerian towards them, and, kneeling down beside the wife, threw her arms round her, and kissed her cheek and said—

“My sister, fear not. I know you, and grieve for you, and I pity you, and I love you both from my deepest heart. And the pity I feel is as the little flicker through the shade, to the glow, the fire of tender saving pity in the sacred heart of Jesus, of Him you once denied, and hate yourselves that you denied Him, of Him you love and shall love for ever and for ever. For He loveth you. I have seen the picture in our catacombs at Rome. I have

seen Him with the lost kid—the kid, not the lamb—on His shoulder. The Church knows Him, and she painted it. And I have heard Him in the sacred Scriptures. And he says, ‘If any man speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him.’ And He made the angel of the resurrection call St. Peter by name, because the last words He had heard from Peter’s lips were, ‘I know Him not.’ *Just because of that*, that he might know he was not forgotten, and was forgiven, and be lifted up to say again one day, ‘Thou knowest all things. Thou knowest that I love thee.’ As you will say—you two, beloved,” she said, rising, “you two, hand in hand, together, weeping, sobbing at His feet, the blessed tears His hand will wipe away.”

And as she spoke, soft and low as her tones were, they were firm and deep as one inspired. And she looked up to heaven, and then down into those sad faces, and the wonderful radiance of her smile embraced them as with a sunbeam.

And for the first time Valerian saw the eyes of the man lifted up, and gazing on the radiant inspired face, as if he were listening to an angel.

"Are you an angel?" he said at length, with a slow, hollow, difficult utterance, as if imprisoned long in a solitary prison, and disused to human speech.

Then the child came back into her face, and she said—

"No; only a child, only a little child that has felt the arms of our Lord about me, and know Him a little, and am sure of His deathless pity for you, as I am sure that He lives."

"Listen!" she said again, with her fingers on her lips. "I seem to see and hear something behind a veil, a thin little veil that will soon melt away. I seem to see the martyrs, the holy angels, the blessed Mary Mother, and my mother, and beloved ones I knew, those who can see His face, and know what He feels. I seem to see them smiling, a happy, wondrous innocent smile, like children with a happy secret they must not tell. I seem to see them smiling on you, and about you two, and saying to each other with their heavenly looks, 'There is a surprise preparing for them! They must not know it just yet. The Church below, per-

haps, may not tell them. But we know all about it. And in a little while they will know; in a very little while."

Then her lip quivered, and she burst into tears, and once more enfolded the woman in her arms and kissed her.

And from the poor quivering lips the kiss was returned.

And Eucharis suffered herself to be gently drawn away.

"I have been waiting to see those two so long," she said to Valerian as they went down the woodland path together, "and just to tell them something of this."

He was silent.

She looked with a little tender solicitude in his face.

"That my dove, my pure white dove, should touch with her white wings creatures soiled like these!" he said at last. "I could scarcely bear it."

The large eyes opened with a long gaze of wonder.

"Valerian!" she said, "love! What am I? And

if I were radiant and pure and fair as the sinless angels, would it not make me whiter and purer and fairer to the eyes of our Lord than even the angels to bring His own down-trodden and soiled and broken-hearted ones home once more in my arms to Him, once more to be pure and free, and themselves His own? The angels cannot wash the poor travel-soiled feet. Only the Master, theirs and ours, the Master and *we*, Valerian, the least of us, even we, you, beloved, and even I."

But the shadow of the sterner belief lay heavy on him, and he said—

"What can my dove know of these things? God forbid she should! The Church is the little band of the King on this revolted earth. And we may not tolerate traitors among us. The Church is the Virgin Bride of the Son of God, and her purity must be guarded, jealously, fiercely guarded, if needful, for Him. You have done or said nothing wrong, beloved," he added, as he saw her wistful eyes downcast and a slight quiver in the parted lips. "Thou hast done and said nothing but what is

heavenly and worthy of thee. But we are not in heaven yet."

"No, Valerian!" she said, lifting her clear courageous shining eyes full to his. "I have said and done nothing wrong. I am a child, and cannot know what the Church ought to do. But I am His child, and I do know a little what our Lord did, and a little of how He loved. And how could I help telling those two, if no one else would?"

And then, responding to a look of grave anxiety in his face, she added—

"I have not grieved thee, love, to-day?"

"How could it grieve me to see into thy heart?" he replied in a tremulous voice, "since it is mine! If its overflow of pity is like a tide to sweep away mountains of trouble, what is its fulness? What is its fulness for me?"

Clement and Viola had drawn away the rest of the bridal company, on the plea of welcoming the bride at the Farm. And now a joyous procession came out to meet them with songs and flowers wreathed and strewn on the path by the children of the estate, old servants, and friends.

CHAPTER XIII.

CLEMENT was far from all unhappy in his cottage. The blessed habits of life-long self-denial and work brought their daily healing; the habit of living in other people's lives, bearing their burdens, really, so that he had no strength to spend on moaning over his own; the habit of rejoicing in other people's happiness, really, so that it brought a positive sunshine into his own heart.

Indeed his life was more tranquil than that in the home he had created for them.

Neither happiness nor sorrow permanently alter character, or even temperament. At least it was so with Valerian, and the existence of a deep satisfying joy in his heart could not take away those ebbings and flowings of the inner tides which were at once his strength and his weakness, could not prevent the problem of the world and with weighing heavily

That his life was doubled in power and joy did not alter the fact of its being lived in the midst of an oppressed and tumultuous world, or save him from often returning from the work of the day in Carthage with a troubled and furrowed brow.

Nevertheless, his life was, indeed, doubled in power and joy; the child-like simplicity of the faith of Eucharis was to him worth countless convincing arguments against doubt.

To her all had come unquestioned: faith, Divine love, human love, marriage. To him nothing came unquestioned. To her religion was fresh air and life and daylight. To him it meant conflict and storm, icy heights, unfathomed abysses, rivers of fire.

The faith taught her in childhood, received into the child's heart, had created a life of Christian love around it which made it as unquestionable as her simplest moral instincts, as her own existence.

And this faith was of the most joyous kind. The Good Shepherd of her Roman catacombs, strong in immortal youth, tenderly gathering the lambs, piping to them, feeding the sheep; the Divine Lord who *was at once light and music* (reconquering the old

Apollo legend), light to mind and heart, by the very touch of the sunbeam, by the very fact of shining, smiting all the heart to harmony with himself, and therefore to all its highest music. The light, which is the life of men, the Shepherd who is the leader and King of men, who knows each one by name, by character, by circumstances; thus it was that the Christ had been revealed in the soul of Eucharis.

The Cross rose behind, not in the foreground of her faith, revealing how all the tenderness of this pitiful, pervading love had welled up from depths unfathomable, and how all the gentleness was no mere easy overflow of kindness, but the forbearance and unutterable sympathy of love stronger than death.

And therefore, when she met Valerian, it seemed to her only the most natural thing in the world that the choice divinely made for her should suit every in and out of her whole being. Had not the Heavenly Father known both of them all the while, and been leading them to each other through all the unseen paths?

She scarcely so much as gave thanks in conscious

words for that supreme blessing, or for others, as looked up instinctively and felt, "This is too good to come from any one but Thee."

The wonder, the horror, the inexplicable mystery was, that all the world, the thirsty, needy, suffering world, still more all the fair and happy creatures in it, should not spring, the instant He was revealed, to this Fountain of Beauty, and Truth, and Life, and Joy.

That he should have died for our redemption added infinite gratitude to the love; but it was the love the dying proved, it was the holy, glorious, beautiful, loving Being who so loved, that had won her heart.

She as really dwelt in His Presence, whatever she did, as a lamb beside the Shepherd. Feeding, playing, lying down by still waters, bathing in them, drinking of them, the conscious sensation of joy pervading each separate act was that He was close, and she was following Him.

She soothed and strengthened Valerian, not so much by going with him into his mists and darkness, though this also she could do, as by keeping

out of them in the sunlight, and shining, and being what she was.

For he had misgivings about so many things. Even this marriage, had it been the highest thing God had meant for him? Had he not been summoned to walk on the lonely heights? Had he not descended into flowery paths and missed the best?

For the whole Church, girt, perhaps, for conflicts unseen, but foreseen for her, was pervaded by the ascetic spirit. And yet the golden words of the ascetic Tertullian in describing a Christian marriage were, Valerian felt, fulfilled in his.

"Where are we to find words," he wrote to his wife, "his best-beloved fellow-servant," "to tell the happiness of that marriage which the Church cements, and the oblation confirms, and the benediction signs and seals; which angels carry the news of to heaven, which the Father ratifies?

"What kind of yoke is that of two believers, partakers of one hope, one desire, one discipline, one and the same service? Both are brethren, both fellow-servants, no difference of spirit or of flesh; nay, they are truly two in one flesh. Where the

flesh is one, one is the spirit too. Together they pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts, mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining. Equally are they both found in the Church of God, equally at the banquet of God, equally in straits, in persecutions, and refreshments. Neither takes aught from the other, neither shuns the other, neither is troublesome to the other. The sick are visited, the indigent relieved with freedom. Alms are given without danger of ensuing torment, sacrifices attended without scruple, daily duties discharged without impediment. There is no stealthy signing, no trembling greeting, no mute benediction. Between the two echo psalms and hymns, and they mutually challenge each other which shall better chant to their Lord.

“Such things, when Christ sees and hears, He joys. To these He sends His own peace.

“Where two are, there withal is He himself. Where He is, there the Evil One is not.”

For so it was that the loveliest bridal flowers strewn by the ancient Church on marriage sprang

from the clefts of that scarred and rugged African rock.

Happy expeditions there were when, in the cool of the morning, Eucharis and Viola started with the docile white ass of the farm, her panniers laden with raisins, bread, or grapes, figs and dates, and flowers such as the seasons brought, to take to the sick and poor of the Church in the city, bringing all the overflow of the gardens and fields into sick-rooms and hard struggling lives, with the blessed sense of brotherly kindness—a kindness which was the natural due and fruit of a relationship; bringing to the monotonous lives of the aged and the sick the shining of their own beauty and happiness.

Then there were the evenings; the gatherings together in the cool, cloistered inner court, or in the vine-embowered garden, or under the broad shadow of the fig or beech-trees near the little river, or on the breezy heights above the sea; singing and reading, and delicious silences, while the waves, or the rustling leaves, or the whispering grasses, or the murmuring brook, spoke and sang to them.

Occasionally Valerian would give them the story

of Virgil, but when he and Eucharis were alone the delight was to climb at once to the glorious old Greek world which was her heritage. No intervening chains of lower ranges hid those grand primeval mountain-tops from them. They dwelt close underneath those fairest and highest heights, and to Eucharis the language was her mother tongue; the rich harmonies were no foreign acquired music to her; they were familiar from infancy with the sacredness of a mother's voice.

The battle and pilgrimage of life, the unfathomable enigma of the world, its heights and its abysses stretched beneath and above and around them, the Iliad and Odyssey, the story of the Bound Titan and of the doom of the fated dynasties, the world as it glows and glooms, soars and sinks to the poets who see its heights, depths, and sing them, undisguised, as they are! And as close to them lay the labours of the philosophers, toiling endlessly at the whence and why; mountains of thought launched into the abysses, yet leaving them unfilled; endless sounding-lines let down, yet leaving them unfathomed; courageous upward climbings to peaks

still unscaled; one fair bridge after another launched forth to span the chasms, yet never reaching the other side.

All those enterprises and achievements which, ever since, the world has wondered at and followed, and never surpassed; so early did our race, beginning with its noblest intellects, beat its wings against the bars of the cage which no hand inside can open!

But to them this old Greek literature was no mere study of a fossil-world. The fauna and flora were not extinct, but, though in feebler forms, were perfuming and poisoning the very air they breathed.

Those ancient heights were still haunted ground. The temples were not in ruins nor empty.

The gods were no mere fair shapes to be handled and modelled from; they were still worshipped, their help was still passionately sought; and if powerless to save they were still mighty, through the hands of their worshippers, to destroy.

Oftenest, however, they turned to their own especial treasures of Christian manuscript. They

scarcely thought of them as a literature: rather as a precious store of family memorials.

The voice of the Master had scarcely died out of hearing, and the Church was ever on the watch to hear it and to see His face again.

And meanwhile she was still a beleaguered city, spared from assaults for years together, lately for more than thirty years, but always liable to be roused by alarms of war.

Naturally, her songs were war-songs, her literature for the most part pleadings in defence or attack.

The beauty and art in them came from the inevitable beauty of the minds they flowed from or of the truths they manifested; the early Christian writings were beautiful as the curves of a boat are beautiful which has to stem the waves, as the curves of a sail are beautiful which has to breast the winds; except, perhaps, during those last thirty years, when Origen and the Alexandrians had consciously worked the Divine doctrine into a philosophy, and Cyprian had begun to polish the rugged thought of Tertullian into literary form. But Origen, as the opposite

pole of religious thought, was not well known in that North African home.

Justin Martyr, Polycarp, Ignatius, the Martyrs of Vienne, Irenæus, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Epistle to Diognetus, were household words.

Legends also from the apocryphal gospels floated in the air of gates of Hades broken; and wild and grotesque traditions of the infancy of our Lord, attempts to fill up that silence of the Gospels which contains in itself its own priceless lessons.

Every morning before the first meal the sacred bread reserved from the Holy Eucharist was partaken, the first food of each day being in this way, they believed, a Holy Communion with the Lord, with the Catholic Church, and with each other.

At nine, at mid-day, and at three, such of the family as were within reach gathered for a few prayers and hymns, and at the close of day all were assembled, and the sound of the hymn rang out through the open doors across the quiet gardens.

But dearest of all their manuscript treasures were Greek copies of the Gospel of St. Luke and St. John and of the Apocalypse.

Dear above all, perhaps, the Apocalypse. The glow and gloom, the thunderings and lightnings, the sea of glass mingled with fire, the lake of fire, the doom of the voluptuous city, throned on many waters, like their own Carthage, attracted the fervent African imagination, whilst Eucharis heard in it the harpers with their harps, and saw everywhere the one glorious face of Him they all adored.

CHAPTER XIV.

THEY were sitting as usual with open doors, after the evening meal, grouped around the grandmother.

And on the old matron's face was a new expression as she bent over the quaint little human being lying swathed and swaddled like a tiny animated mummy on her knee.

Another little creature, as precisely alike as any two creatures of God's can be, was folded to the heart of Eucharis.

It was two months now since these twin creatures had begun their outlook on the world; and the four dark eyes and the rosy twin lips, which were all that were left the little imprisoned beings wherewith to express their small personalities, had already learned and expressed a great deal, and communicated an unutterable amount of delight.

Old words of endearment hovered on the grand-

mother's lips, and forgotten stores of nursery wisdom and nursery lore. And Clement had come back to the old home, drawn by the attraction of the helpless little ones.

The anguish so faithfully combated and concealed had not indeed vanished as an unreal dream, it had entered into the depths of his being and enriched and deepened everything within, as all true sorrow and all true joy must.

And now through these little creatures, this new Charis and Ion, whose future might reach on so far, all his labours and victories had heirs—had a perpetuity of value which endeared them tenfold.

Every oldest memory of the grandmother's childhood, every newest vine and fig-tree in the gardens, had a meaning and an endurance reaching on through these baby hands to generations yet to be.

These new precious lives were not only the blossom of all the family life, they deepened all its roots, and gave every possession a solidity which almost lifted it among the things which abide.

Such thoughts passed through Clement's heart as he trained the straggling vine-branch around the

porch in which they sat; so calm, so well rooted, so complete seemed this innocent, hallowed family life of theirs among the hills.

The last note of the evening hymn had but just died away, the household had but just dispersed. Valerian was late that night, and when he came a cloud was on his brow which made Eucharis gently lay the baby in her arms on Viola's knee, and go apart with her husband.

When in a few minutes she came back the gravity was as deep on her face as on Valerian's; and, kneeling beside the grandmother, she took her hands and looked imploringly in the strong venerable face.

"You know what it means, mother," she said. "You will help us all."

"Poor helpless hands to help any; fit for little it seems but to fondle thy babes. What threatens us, my child? The Goths you are so tender to? the Numidians? or an insurrection?"

Then, as if the light came suddenly to her from the depths of the young mother's eyes, grave and wide open under the straight smooth brows, she

clasped her own hands over her face and murmured—

“A persecution! It has come! It has come at last! From whom? From what quarter?” she added, after a moment’s silence. “Perhaps it is only local, only the mob, only some temporary fury of the heathens at Carthage. There have been droughts in some places, and we know the proverb, ‘Non pluit Deus, duc ad Christianos.’ We could flee! perhaps, even I! Or it might never penetrate to this quiet nook.”

“We have tried to help so many,” said Viola, taking comfort; “surely no one hates us, or would like to see us suffer.”

“There is no fleeing, mother; there is no place whither to flee,” said Eucharis. “It is the Emperor that has issued the edict.”

Valerian sat silent, but all the little group clustered close around him. He shook his head.

“It is too true. It is the empire that persecutes, and beyond the empire is nothing—nothing but the barbarian and the desert.”

At that moment the brisk step of Priscus was heard on the threshold,

"I came to warn you," he said. "I heard your evening hymn on the other side of the valley. It is madness at such a time. Any pagan labourer returning from his day's work might hear it and denounce you."

"Denounce us?" said Eucharis. "I thought they would not wait for that. I thought the edict was that every Christian was to repair to the Tribunal to sacrifice, or was to die."

"Of course that is the meaning of the edict—next week at latest. The Emperor Decius is bent on exterminating the Christian Church and religion, nothing less. But you need not surely take this opportunity of proclaiming ostentatiously to the whole world that you are Christians."

"Our every meal, every day, our every act in common proclaims us," said Viola.

"Of course, if you so choose," said Priscus. "Of course the Emperor cannot exterminate the Church. The Emperor is a madman to attempt it. But at the same time, in a combat with madmen, we may

have, for a time, to bend to their delusions, for their sakes even more than our own."

"To sacrifice for Cæsar? To deny Christ?" came in different tones from all sides.

"I never suggested such a thing. You have what is more precious to many of the heathen than the torture and death of peaceable fellow citizens. You have lands and money. I came to suggest that exemption may be purchased. I do not say it should. But since sacrificing for Cæsar means no more even to the intelligent heathen than acknowledging him to be Cæsar; since we know from the highest authority it is lawful to pay tribute, even by an idolatrous coin, to Cæsar——"

"To become Libellatici!" exclaimed Valerian, "to buy a lying certificate that we have sacrificed! It is adding lying to treachery."

"Of course there are two sides to everything," replied Priscus. "For myself, I can do what I please; but when you have other precious lives depending on you—I should have thought—I venture to offer no counsel," he continued, "only I thought it right to give you a friendly warning about the hymn."

And with a brief leave-taking he vanished, returning to the city. Heavy silence fell on the little company when that busy buzzing voice was gone, which seemed to bring with it the buzzing of swarming Carthage.

"Children," said the grandmother, "read from the Apocalypse. Read it through."

And late into the night they sat.

Solemnly, as if fresh from heaven, fell on their hearts the faithful warnings to slumbering and failing churches, the tender bringing into light of the least good thing in the worst.

And then the lifting of the veil of heaven, and the vision of the prismatic light, and the fulness of varied life around the throne.

Then the sweeping outbursts of judgment—the seven trumpets of doom echoing through heaven, the seven vials outpoured.

War, and tumult, and anguish, and wrong, and even in heaven the cry, "Oh Lord, how long?" Strangely, inextricably blended, the thunders and lightnings, the crystal calms, the woes, and the hal-lujahs. But at the end victory and purity, evil

overcome with good, the city as a bride, the tree of life for the healing of the nations, the serving day and night, the presence of God, himself the Temple.

"The smoke of her torment shall go up for ever and ever," said Valerian, as they closed. "Every wrong will be avenged."

And Clement almost moaned, "Blessed is he that overcometh."

"I saw the Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God," said Viola, "prepared as a bride. Every true heart will be satisfied."

"King of kings, and Lord of lords," said Justa, "He shall wipe all tears from their eyes."

"They shall see His face," murmured Eucharis.

"Children," the grandmother said, "read me the words I love from 'the master,' and then we will pray."

Viola read: "Old world prayer used to free men from fires and beasts and famine. But how far more operative is Christian prayer! It does not station the angel of dew in mid-fire nor muzzle

He who knew what a storm was about to burst had gathered this frail vessel into port before it came.

But no one seemed to mourn so much or to lose so much in her as Eucharis, so tender had the welcome of the aged woman been to the orphan stranger, so closely had she clasped to her heart her grandson's bride.

Eucharis loved to go and sit beside the venerable form day and night.

When Valerian came back in the evening he found her there, with one babe in her arms asleep.

He shuddered to find her there. The great thunder-cloud lowering over them all filled the heavens with portents and the air with mutterings and the heart with evil omens, and he shrank to see his beloved, his life of life, in such close and voluntary communion with death.

She was not weeping, though her eyes were moist, as she looked up with an expression of exalted trust into his face.

"She has breasted her last storm," Eucharis said, "and see how peaceful it has left her! That look comes, not from this shore, nor from the stormy

sea, but from the other shore. She is waiting there, with the blessed ones she so loved and revered, for us. See, beloved," she added gently, rising and trying to kiss the trouble from his brow; "that is what is meant by what we call shipwreck; being tossed on our own shore, being tossed home, just as I was."

He drew her gently away.

"It seems as if thy spirit went with her, my own," he said, "and that may not, must not be. We are in the tempest-tossed fleet together—together still. To me it seems as if all the past died with her. While she lived Tertullian lived for us, and Irenæus, and even Polycarp, all whose voice she had heard, with whom she had breathed this mortal air, all even whose children and comrades she had known."

"Is it so with thee?" Eucharis said. "To me they all seem to *live* the more, now that she whose kiss has been on my lips and my babes', whose dear voice has called us tender, childish, petting names, is with that solemn company, is as they have long been. They seem to grow familiar to me, as if

they, too, might welcome us with motherly smiles and endearments."

"She is indeed on the safe shore," he said. "She is underneath the altar. But we, we are not only tempest-tossed towards that shore, the whole fleet is broken, scattered, flung hither and thither, the fairest vessels making full sail for alien ports, some running foul of each other, some creeping away out of sight, hugging the shore of this world. It has been a terrible day in Carthage."

Clement and Viola and Justa joined them as he spoke.

"Have our brothers fallen, brother?" said Clement.

"Call them not brothers," said Valerian, his face flushing. "They went out from us because they were not of us. They have not even waited for the appointed day of sacrifice, two days hence. I saw them to-day, a wretched, traitor-troop, creeping beforehand to swear by the genius of the Emperor; some making light of it, others pallid and shivering like a troop of panting ghosts. The very heathen jeered at them. But worst of all are the Libellatici.

Priscus showed me his certificate this morning. 'See,' he said, 'the lie is not mine but theirs. They know I do not mean what I pay them for saying I do.' And the coward expected me to acknowledge him still as one of us!"

"You refused to speak to him?" said Clement.

"Certainly," Valerian added.

"Did he seem angry?" asked Clement.

"He turned crimson, and then death-pale," Valerian said calmly. "Perhaps the arrow hit what he has left living of a conscience. For he turned away sullenly and said, 'There are worse apostates than the Libellatici. The Church receives such back. The last may yet be first.' I suppose, threatening me."

"Threatening thee!" said Clement. But there was not so much astonishment as deep sadness and solicitude in his voice.

"Does the Church receive back the Libellatici?" asked Eucharis.

"In these soft and indulgent days, yes!" said Valerian. "But no one can make us welcome them back to our homes."

"Ah, my Valerian!" she said softly, the tears filling her eyes, "to welcome any lost ones back is sweet, is sweetest of all, if only they really come."

"Threatening thee!" Clement reiterated, as if lost in musing. "But ah, not only thee; me, thee, all of us! I was reading this night, as I kept vigil in the chamber of our dead, the letter she loved from the churches of Lyons and Vienne to their mother church in Asia Minor. The humility of those martyrs was so deep they earnestly rebuked those who dignified them with the name of martyrs. 'To One only that sacred name fully belongs,' they said, bleeding and exhausted as they lay in prison for Him, 'to the faithful and true martyr, the First-born from the dead, the Prince of life, or at most to those whose witness to him has been sealed by constancy to death. We are but poor lowly confessors.' They sent no messages of absolution from prison; they sent humble entreaties for prayer that they might endure to the end. And when those whom the torture had overcome were thrown among them in prison, they received them with the tenderest pity and love; they prayed God that their Lord

would once more restore these dead to life; and on their betrayers and tormentors never a word of vengeance!"

"Read the letter to us," pleaded Eucharis.

"Not now, I think," he said; "the tortures were terrible, and I know not that it helps to dwell on these. The brethren write, that through all their torments they were 'bedewed and strengthened by the spring of living water that flows from the heart of Christ; for nothing can be dreadful,' they say, 'where the love of the Father dwells; nothing harmful where the glory of Christ prevails.' The story moved me deeply," he added. "But it was not so much their suffering or their consolations; it was that the very image of the Crucified seemed to shine through them, forgiving, trusting, loving to the end, only distrusting themselves as, necessarily, He could not distrust himself. It gave me a little hope," he concluded.

"A little hope, brother, my brother!" said Valerian; "as if any of us could fear for thee!"

"I have feared for myself," he replied. "Such small things are temptations to me; such little things

are delight and grief to me; a drought, a failure in any of the fruit-trees, the devastations of insects on the vines, or the rain-floods sweeping away our terraces. I have said, 'If these things so move me, how shall I stand those? Who shall dwell with the devouring fire?' And then came the answer, 'Even then He would strengthen me who has not suffered me quite to fail even in these.' It is a disgrace that such trifles should have tempted me, but I have not sworn deceitfully. I have ever thrown away the bad and sold only the good, and estimated all at its true worth. And if the 'devouring fire,' the bruising stones, the rack and cruel scourges, are to come, then we may trust that we also may see the King of saints as never before in His beauty, and be not unwilling to go to Him in the land that is very far off."

So many words from Clement moved them all to the heart—from Clement whose words were so few.

But yet they, in their ignorance, half accepted his verdict about himself. They half believed he had been too covetous over his vines and fig-trees.

And none of them knew the "devouring fire"

that had laid waste his heart and shrivelled his fondest hopes. All saw and loved the gentleness, but none else knew, nor did he conceive to what strength that hidden fire had tempered his will and his heart.

The fatal day named in the Edict dawned. Every Christian throughout the empire was to swear by the genius of the Emperor, to lay incense on the altar; or to be liable to torture and death.

The day passed tranquilly at the farm. It was the funeral day of the grandmother.

The sacred casket of the treasure that had passed from them was laid with the tenderest reverence in the catacombs, near the martyrs she had so loved.

And at the Holy Eucharist, the family, and many Christians who had known her, commemorated her for the first time as among those in "the land of the living," and for ever at rest, still gathered around one Holy Table, still waiting beneath one sacred altar, still living by one Immortal Life.

It was a day of solemn hush and expectation. That evening, any hour in any day or night after

that, the blow of the persecutor might fall, the tread of the inexorable officers of justice might be heard on the threshold of that quiet home.

The unity of the attack is something difficult for us to comprehend in these days of extended empire, of many tongues and many kingdoms.

Underneath all that wide dome of sky which they thought roofed the world, the civilised world was absolutely one. What lay beyond seemed to them scarcely to be called the "inhabited earth." It was a ragged edge of wilderness, bordering the true human world, haunted by wild beasts and wilder men, by hordes and hordes of wild men, pressing, indeed, in these last years on the empire, but no more possible to be dwelt among peaceably than the arena when filled with Numidian lions and gladiators. And the power of this whole world was in the hand of one who was set on exterminating the Christian Church from the earth, deliberately, legally, not by riots and irregular passionate mobs which might irregularly massacre and might irregularly spare; but by the agency of a most elaborately

organized government, still alive to the extremities of the empire to punish, if not to defend or save.

By exterminating the Christian Church, the men who had undertaken it by no means meant a general massacre of Christians. They meant, deliberately, every engine of persuasion, or of torture, applied perseveringly, unremittingly, skilfully, discriminatingly, to every individual Christian, to make them cease to be Christians, and so once more begin to be "good citizens and subjects."

The first onset succeeded beyond the most sanguine expectations. The mixed multitude who had gathered around the Christian host during the thirty years of peace scattered at once, melting into the fluctuating indefinite masses around.

The cupidity of the local magistrates disposed of many more, accepting fines and payments instead of sacrifice.

The band that met in the Christian churches in Carthage the Sunday after the day of sacrifice was visibly thinned.

Yet the sifting was far from accomplished. As

yet the Proconsul was absent from the city, and the persecution was carried on with some languor.

Many who had commercial relations with other cities had time to pack up their treasures, arrange their affairs, even sell houses and gardens, and depart to places where, being less known, they might have more chance of escaping denunciation.

Once more Priscus came, and, undeterred by the coolness of his reception, counselled the family to take this alternative before it was too late.

The Bishop Cyprian himself, he said, had retired to a place of seclusion on the coast, deeming himself better able at that moment to serve the Church by ruling and exhorting her thence than by dying in her midst.

A purchaser might, he thought, be found for some portion of the farm; and there was some introduction of the name of Viola. But no encouragement was given to any of his counsel, and his suggestions appeared to be so entirely incomprehensible to the family, that he retired baffled, and returned to Carthage.

But the alternative he had indicated had made more impression than he knew.

Clement, walking round the gardens that night, binding up straggling branches and pruning away superfluous leaves, uprooting weeds, half-unconsciously, with the old habit of order and care, fell into great questionings of himself.

So dear to him were these gardens and fields he had made, dear as a picture he had painted, a poem he had written, as a treasure held in trust for the happiness of those he loved, as the work the Master had given him, on every inch of which the seal of His blessing seemed to be visibly stamped—could it be that cowardice, for him, lay in cleaving to those familiar things, not in abandoning them?

Might it be that the true sacrifice he was called to was to sell this creation of his, and go forth a pilgrim and stranger with the rest?

He returned to the house in the hope of judging more clearly in the solitude of his chamber, undistracted by the haunting presence of these things which seemed to claim his care. But no steady sleep came to him, only a broken slumber, with a

troubled dream of lying buried deep down in a grave under the hills, with roots of great fig-trees and tendrils of vines twining themselves about the fibres of his heart, growing bone of his bone, drawing their nourishment from his life, the things given to man to feed on actually feeding on him, and he not dead, but conscious of it, yet helpless to escape.

He awoke as if a burden had been disentangled from him; in his ears seemed to echo the words, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;" in his heart he answered, "Yea, Lord; nor shall my death consist in the abundance of these things possessing me."

"Valerian," he said, the next morning, "I am ready, if we all think it best. Let who will buy the farm, if thereby we may get the sisters and the babes into some secure place. What the Bishop has done cannot be wrong for us to do."

But Valerian was sitting with the manuscript of Tertullian, "De Fugâ in Persecutione," unrolled before him.

"The matter stands thus," he read; "we have *either both things in our own power, or they wholly*

But the alternative he had indicated had made more impression than he knew.

Clement, walking round the gardens that night, binding up straggling branches and pruning away superfluous leaves, uprooting weeds, half-unconsciously, with the old habit of order and care, fell into great questionings of himself.

So dear to him were these gardens and fields he had made, dear as a picture he had painted, a poem he had written, as a treasure held in trust for the happiness of those he loved, as the work the Master had given him, on every inch of which the seal of His blessing seemed to be visibly stamped—could it be that cowardice, for him, lay in cleaving to those familiar things, not in abandoning them?

Might it be that the true sacrifice he was called to was to sell this creation of his, and go forth a pilgrim and stranger with the rest?

He returned to the house in the hope of judging more clearly in the solitude of his chamber, undistracted by the haunting presence of these things which seemed to claim his care. But no steady sleep came to him, only a broken slumber, with a

afar; we are mere legionaries; we have but to stay at our post and stand."

"But the women and the babes?" said Clement.

"If these led us to flee and fail," replied Valerian, almost fiercely, "then were the worst the austere say of marriage true."

Eucharis looked up with a quiet courage. "Christian women are not mere lambs," she said, "to be folded and sheltered; we are your fellow-servants and soldiers, to share the conflict and the suffering. Few persecutions without some of us among the martyrs!"

Clement said no more. And as the days passed by he began to think the safest as well as the happiest course might be to remain where they were.

Priscus had returned humiliated and sullen to Carthage.

That evening he had had an invitation to an entertainment at one of the best heathen houses in the city.

He had hesitated about going. Whichever way

he turned his self-love was wounded. The Christians evidently looked on him as an alien, and the heathen as a soldier looks at a deserter from the enemy, or as a patrician at a freedman pretentiously claiming equality with the always free.

He resolved, however, to make the plunge. He must be one thing or the other. And mere security demanded that he should not seem to shrink from the society whose ranks he had joined.

There was much jesting about the dolorous way in which these new Christians kept the festivals; but they would unlearn their morose ways in time. Priscus himself was complimented on his ease and gaiety, and was apparently admitted to the circle with an intimacy which charmed him. It was certainly a freedom to have left the old ascetic rules behind, and to have no limit to one's society but that it should be the best of its kind. Cliques must always be narrow, and what was the Church but a clique?

Gradually he was drawn into conversation about one and another of his Christian associates, and especially about the family at the farm.

"They seem too good to belong to such a misanthropic sect," the host concluded. "It would evidently be a service to them to persuade them, though by means a little severe, out of so servile a superstition; especially this Valerian, of whose eloquence and large-mindedness you say so much. He must be recovered at any cost to the State. And this farm itself," he added, "seems a possession not to be despised."

"Far from me to draw down what they would consider trouble on the good people," Priscus said apologetically. "I think some of them would never yield—perhaps none of them easily."

"No doubt you honourably shrink from involving old associates," said the host, not without a tone of sarcasm in his voice; "everything shall be done with discrimination. But there are evidently treasures there worth recovering for the State; and, of course, easy or not, the decree must be carried out. But all that will be arranged when the Proconsul returns. Meantime, sir, we thank you for your valuable information."

The familiar manner had retired into the official.

Priscus felt himself sifted, comprehended, used, and dismissed.

With an uneasy sense of humiliation he went home. Had he then given "valuable information?" That meant virtually, Had he made a terrible denunciation? Had he sunk so low already as to be an informer, a traitor? Should he go again to the farm to warn them of the peril?

Of what use would it be? They had evidently despised his advice, or looked at it as a temptation of the devil.

And, after all, if he had not quite meant to lay them open to the persecution, there was certainly something insufferable in that cool confidence and contempt of Valerian's. Such pretensions as his ought to be tested.

And Clement had an abundance of common sense; he would probably find some way out of the difficulty. It would make them all more merciful in future; and surely mercy was one of the first Christian graces.

And yet, and yet, in spite of all his self-de-

Lapsed, but not Lost.

fence, the peaceable little home haunted him in his dreams.

And he woke with a burden on his mind. "An irrational burden," he said to himself. "I at least am on the safe side; it is merely the reaction of yesterday's feasting. I am on the safe side, and there one can best help one's friends on the dangerous side. Who knows what I may be able to do for them yet?"

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CHAPTER XVI.

SOLEMN and blessed were the weeks that followed at the farm.

Every gathering at the Holy Eucharist on the Sunday showed some diminution of the numbers.

Some were in prison for the faith; many had fallen.

"The Church," as the old African master had said of a former persecution, "was awe-struck. Then was faith more zealous in preparation and better disciplined in fasts, and meetings and prayers, and lowliness, in brotherly kindness and love, in holiness and temperance. These tortures will be the fiery darts of the devil, by which faith gets a ministry of burning and kindling."

The thinned ranks pressed closer to each other; the thanksgivings and the prayers had meaning, all empty words being pruned away; many of the faces that remained had the calm and inspiration of earlier

days, and others were wet with humbling, penitent tears.

Intervening voices grew faint; the One Voice that commands, the One Face whose light can sustain, the One Lord for whom, if such were His will, they were to suffer, grew nearer and clearer to the menaced company every day.

Letters came among them also from Cyprian. "I gladly rejoice and am thankful," he wrote to the confessors, "most brave and blessed brethren, in hearing of your faith and virtue, wherein the Church our mother glories. Of you I find some are already crowned; while some are now within reach of the crown of victory; but all whom the danger has shut up in a glorious company are animated to carry on the struggle with an equal and common warmth of valour as behoves the soldiers of Christ and the Divine camp. It shall be no light contest for you since God appoints the struggle." He warned them to humility. "Before His Passion," he said, "the Lord himself girded himself and washed the disciples' feet."

Deep sank the brave and sympathetic words into

the softened hearts. They knew it would have been easier to the Bishop to die with them than thus to live apart from them.

At last the summons came.

One morning once more the family had gathered at the chapel of the catacombs.

The words of St. Peter had been read to them, echoing through the old Punic vaults, "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you;" and as they issued forth again into the light, in the corner shadowed by the rock where the lapsed husband and wife had knelt, a little band of government officers stood drawn up to intercept them.

One of the officials gave a sign to the others, as Clement and Valerian came out, and the brothers were at once seized and bound to be led away.

Eucharis and the sisters pressed close to them. "We are all one," they said; "take us all!"

"We have no commission beyond these," was the grim and brief reply. "Your time, no doubt will come."

The rest of the congregation were suffered to disperse, even the priests and the deacons, but none were suffered to linger about the catacombs.

The soldiers compelled the little company to divide in their varied homeward directions, and then, surrounding the two captives, they marched rapidly away to Carthage.

It had come at last, all that they most dreaded.

Not in a thunder-clap; with all external quietness, the officers doing their duty without passion, the brothers submitting to the doom without resistance; the band of men, captors and captives, silently marching down the shaded paths among the vineyards and gardens; the little forsaken band of women, the three sisters, silently watching, as so often before, until they were hidden in the valley on the way to Carthage.

Eucharis seemed endued with supernatural strength. She had comprehended the whole possibility in an instant, and, as Valerian was led away, for one moment she held his hands in hers, and, looking up with undimmed eyes into his, she said with low rapid utterance—

"Beloved, fear nothing for me. In ordinary deaths we cannot choose, and we might have to go separately. In this we *can* choose, we must choose. And we will go to our Lord together."

The wonderful radiance of her smile lit up her face as she spoke, as if, through it, her whole soul were embracing his; and in that illumination, as in a halo, her face was enshrined to him as he went away.

And as Clement looked back, being the last, the smile lighted up again as with a faint but tender after-glow, shining indeed individually on him, and full of reverence and sweetness, but as if from far above, like a soft dew of light from the wings of an angel.

So the women went back to the lonely house to weep and pray, and carry on the household duty, and, defenceless as they were themselves, to guard as best they might the defenceless babes. Few words passed between them.

Although, in one sense, the blow had fallen, in another there was still a time of suspense; and a

suspense whose balance is weighed down mainly on the side of fear leaves little desire for speech.

Nor, indeed, did they weep much. There were too many sacred duties left them to do. The gardens and farm were still Clement's, and as his creation, his possession, or his memorial, every trellised vine and carefully watered orchard was sacred.

The slaves clustered about them for commands and for consolation. For the most part Christian, and from father to son settled on the farm, they were faithful and attached, but smitten, at first, into helplessness by terror and by the loss of the master; until by degrees they began to feel that the order of the household was to be unbroken.

The first impulse of the sisters had been to abandon the routine of daily life altogether—the routine which had become so unmeaning—and to give themselves to one long unbroken vigil of fasting and prayer.

But Eucharis would not have it so.

At the sunset she firmly insisted on summoning the household for the evening prayer.

"It is a confession. You remember Priscus said so," she said, with shining eyes. "*They* are confessing gloriously, and we shall be joining our feeble voices to theirs." And clear through the gardens rang the rich tones of her voice in the familiar evening hymn—

"Joyful light of holy glory
Of the Immortal Father,
Blessed, Holy Jesus Christ!"

At first her voice alone, but soon joined in tremulous, tearful tones by sisters and servants, aged and children, till at last the notes pealed like a hymn of triumph through the valley.

They had not long closed when Priscus appeared, cautiously creeping up in the dark.

"I came to see if I could help in any way," he stammered, in a feeble voice of remonstrance. "But you must be mad—mad. Do you not know that every note is a summons to the enemy to fall on you?"

"We do know that every note is a confession of our Lord," said Eucharis. "Did it sound like it?" and she added in a low, firm tone, "My place is at

his side; you know, I am vowed to that. I shall wait to see whether they call for me. But, sooner or later, no one can hinder my sacred right to be there!"

CHAPTER XVII.

CLEMENT and Valerian went silently along the familiar garden-paths to the walls of Carthage, their hands bound, and hurried by occasional rough touches from the staves of their captors, for the soldiers had orders to be expeditious.

Valerian flushed and his lips parted with an indignant exclamation as the first indignity of blows fell on him.

And for the first time the whole meaning of martyrdom flashed on him.

The story of the Cross and the acts of the martyrs had to him from infancy been sacred histories.

Around those thorn-crowned brows unconsciously he had seen a halo of glory. The very thorns had become a crown, not of scorn, but of redoubled glory; the cross was the most sacred of symbols; the rack, the scourges, the torture-chambers of the martyrs,

had, unconsciously to him, been attended in his imagination by the tender, reverent presence of sympathetic fellow-Christians.

And now a rude blow fell on his shoulders, on his cheek, with a coarse laugh or curse, just as blows and curses might fall on any troublesome and refractory slave, and the indignant expression of resentment scarcely formed on his lips had been answered by a buffet on his mouth.

As they entered the gate Priscus was standing near, and, at the moment their eyes met, some mischievous boys threw handfuls of mud into Valerian's face, which filled his eyes and for the moment blinded him. He heard the mocking laughter and felt the helplessness of the bound hands, and when he opened his eyes again he saw a smile on the face of Priscus at his bespattered face and clothes. Eyes smarting from a trick of mocking boys, hands unable to shelter them, not glorious scars, but a bespattered face, bruises, buffets, petty insults, the sufferings in themselves so small that a child might have laughed at them, and the associations so mean and low;—was this indeed the first taste of martyrdom, so little

in itself elevating and sacred, so like any other kind of small misery, so entirely without anything peculiar in it to ennoble, and to strengthen to endure it? He had unconsciously thought of martyrdom as in itself a kind of sacrament, which would bring its own strength. He found it simply like any other of the many tests and temptations, any one of the many rough, common steps of life, *all* sacred as being steps of a pilgrimage, or *none*.

To Clement also came the same petty insults, and to him also came the thought, how like these first steps of martyrdom were to others trodden before. But to him the thought came not as a bitter but a joyful surprise. Were the rough steps of this lofty untrodden path so like the humble daily steps of the old well-trodden path? These few rugged steps which might be the last, and might prove such a rapid ascent to the very gates of the city, to the feet of the Saviour.

For, almost more than he suffered himself to think, these petty mockings and buffetings recalled the bitter steps trodden for him by Another. A flood of joy he scarcely dared admit into his heart came

with the adoring thought how "they smote Him on the face," and blindfolded, mocked, and buffeted Him through all the long tumultuous night, how He was "despised," how the first steps of the way of the Cross itself were petty insults and mockeries, and how He pitied and loved through all. "Can it be possible," he thought, "that Thou sufferest us to walk so close in Thy own steps? Could the simple habit of following lead to a following so near, so evident as this?"

His eyes met the restless gaze of Priscus, and he also saw the half-triumphant smile which Valerian had resented. But over his heart came a pang of pity for the deserter, which for the time made him forget himself entirely. The kind frank eyes rested with a long grave gaze on the face of Priscus, and there was something in their expression that made Priscus for a moment see himself as he was, and turn away, not angry, but humiliated and ashamed at heart.

At the prison the brothers were separated. Clement was thrown into a room with many others.

Valerian, for some reason unknown to him, was alone; perhaps because those who had to discriminate knew what would prove the severest test to him.

Clement had the ordinary distresses of the prison—stifling air; the rude pressure of crowds, some of them criminals for low crimes; coarse fare, coarse speech; bad air, no light suffering to him with his habits of healthy, regular, country work, his life on the fresh, open hills, the unwontedness to him of din and crowding. He had no solitude, and found little time for the quiet regular devotion he was used to. His prayers had to be little more than ejaculations, the presence of the sins and sufferings of those around lay so close and thick upon him; stories of homes left desolate by being deprived of the head; fears of untried hearts expecting to be summoned to confession and torture; men who had left them a few hours before vigorous and young, returning feeble and tottering, bleeding and maimed from the preliminary examination. For, as Tertulian said, in other trials men were tortured to confess; in this, having confessed and being ready to

die, they were, contrary to all law, tortured to forswear themselves and deny.

And besides these, there were the heathen criminals, over whom Clement's soul yearned unspeakably.

But to Valerian none of this was appointed; none of this mingling him with the common crowd, which might have nerved him by touching his heart with the wants of others.

He was set, as one of another class, in a room apart, airy, and furnished. He was served with civility and provided with wholesome food; and he was treated with consideration, and his solitude respected, except when occasionally one or another Roman official with whom he had been acquainted came and courteously remonstrated with him.

"He was so much above this kind of thing! Of course all educated men knew the valuelessness of popular superstitions; and as far as Christianity was a high moral teaching and a philosophy, which on some sides many were quite ready to admit it was, there could be no reason against his retaining it. It was even granted that there might be some-

thing fanatical in this assault on the religion. It was in part political, arising from the necessity Decius felt to put down the partisans of his predecessor, Philip the Arabian, who had been said to favour the Christians. It was merely a temporary thing, this violent assault. It would only be necessary to bow for a while till the hurricane blew over. That he should be required to make a concession might be tyrannical; but what he was required to yield were the merest externals, a mere acknowledgment to satisfy a new government a little uneasy at the way it had arrived at power, by showing that no disloyalty was intended.

"The Christian Church had of late proved itself, it must be admitted, rather a strong organization; and strong secret societies were of course impossibilities in any strongly organized state.

"And if any concession were demanded, surely nothing less could be required of any than an acknowledgment of the genius of Cæsar—whatever that meant, an antiquated mode of saying that you were a subject of Cæsar—and a few grains of incense offered to whom, or to what, who pretended to explain?

One of their own great teachers, it was reported, had said, 'An idol was nothing at all;' well, a few grains of incense cast forth into nothing, into the void, what were they?

"And what did he concede? Simply the vulgar superstition which had encrusted that high philosophic morality, which no one could fail to admire; if a little severe and joyless, always high and pure. After all, it was to a popular superstition he yielded in *refusing* to sacrifice. He himself must surely be above that! He but yielded one superstition to another. An unfair demand, perhaps, but how slight! And after all he was a Roman, an imperial officer, and knew how Rome was beset, and how essential it was that she should rule."

Such things were said to Valerian by many friendly, familiar voices of old acquaintance, meaning not to tempt but to help—meaning him not evil, but good.

"You have made us almost Christians," they said, "often before now, by your eloquent words, by your good pure life. You would not destroy this influence by letting us imagine that your religion,

like the rest, is after all only a blind superstition, or the obstinacy of a secret revolutionary sect?"

And all this only as an echo to the conflicts and questionings in his own mind.

For, in this terrible solitude, it became clearer and clearer to him that to him Christianity had been chiefly a combination of two things: a great philosophic morality, and a mighty organization.

And now he was not even called upon to deny this philosophy, he was not called upon even to say an unworthy word against the Sacred Name. He was only called on to disjoin himself temporarily from outward adhesion to a society which the State thought dangerous—a society in which he knew too well how mixed the elements were, how low and poor some of the lives.

Christianity to him had been a philosophy and a patriotism. It had scarcely been a faith. But his whole true and loyal nature shrank—shrank as the heart of a citizen of old Rome—from an unpatriotic act, from deserting what to him was the fatherland of his people, and the city in which he was enrolled

as a citizen, in this her hour of humiliation and ruin.

Steadfastly, therefore, he resisted all these friendly appeals, and went forth to confess and to suffer. At the tribunal once more the brothers met. From the lips of both came the same confession—

“I am a Christian.”

“I will not sacrifice.”

But the eloquence seemed to have passed from the countenance and the voice of Valerian to Clement.

Stern and fixed as the face of a Roman soldier required to take a post or die was Valerian's mobile face as the brief words came from his lips. His glance was not upward but forward, not upward as one who looks for an invisible presence, nor frankly on any around, except when he gazed on Clement whilst he spoke the fatal words. And there his gaze seemed riveted; such a radiance was on the elder brother's face, such a repressed joy in his tones, as they rang through the listening assembly, that the brief sentence, “I am a Christian,” in those tones,

was in itself a *Te Deum*, an eucharistic hymn, a song of triumph.

Almost bitterly Valerian turned his eyes away. He seemed looking through his brother's eyes, as sometimes we look through the eyes of the dying, into a world he could not see, up to a Face he could not see; and with a feeling almost of reproach against God, the thought came to him, "Thou hast hid these things from the wise and revealed them unto babes," and an echo of his grandmother's words, "Do you think the arena is the only place where the devil does not suggest that there are two sides to everything?"

But seeing or not seeing, shadow or substance, rejoicing or despairing, for this same cause, in this same Church, he had to suffer.

And he suffered; limb racked from limb, flesh torn with scourge and cruel hooks, he endured all without a word, almost without a moan, until the anguish took away his senses, and he was remanded to the prison.

And through the agony, as if from another world,

came to him in the tones of his brother's voice, the words, as from an earlier martyr:

"Thanks to Thee, O Christ! Help me, O Christ! For Thee do I suffer thus, O Christ! for a short while, with a willing mind. Let me not fail.

"O Lord Jesus Christ, we are Christians! Thee do we serve, Thou art our Hope! O God most holy, O God most high, still this tempest of persecution. Give rest to Thy servants. Give peace to Thy Church. Forgive these, forgive, as Thou hast forgiven us.

"Thou who hast come to save, Thou who hast died forgiving, forgive these! O Lord Christ, forgive—forgive and save!"

With Valerian's more finely strung nerves, every pang, moreover, intensified by an imaginative temperament, the bodily strength succumbed earlier than with Clement.

The last words that fell on his ear before he fainted were these, "Thou who hast died forgiving, Lord Christ, forgive and save!" and never did their echo die from his heart.

Alone again in the prison! through the long

hours of fever and pain. But not this time in the easy furnished chamber; still alone, but thrust down into a dungeon, damp, and utterly dark, with foul and noisome creatures crawling about him, as he lay helpless there; and always the terrible thought haunting him: "For what am I suffering? For what the martyrs suffered? For Him whom Clement adores? Am I? Is it not rather, as they say, from obstinacy to an old persuasion, from fear of being despised by my own society, from horror of being among the lapsed, pointed at by all? Is it courage or is it cowardice for which I suffer?"

At midnight, it seemed as if from some fresh order of the government, they took him from the dungeon, placed him again in the chamber he had been in before, dressed his wounds, and gave him food and cordials.

And then, while it was still dark, Priscus, not triumphant, but looking haggard and troubled, came to his couch and said, "You have confessed nobly. You have suffered enough. I come with a proposition made to few."

Valerian shrank as if from a serpent. "Only tell me, what do you know of Clement?"

"He was taken back to the prison, given up for dead," was the reply. And there was a tremulousness and depth in his voice. "Your brother is a saint," he added. "I did not know him. I thought he was an ordinary good man, and would have succumbed to the needs of the time."

"*You thought?*" said Valerian abruptly, "Was it then you who brought us to this?"

"Nay," was the confused, stammering reply. "I would have kept you all safe. But now just let me warn you of the new peril that threatens. Your wife threatens to come and denounce herself. She says her place is at your side. She has waited hitherto to be summoned; but she said she would not wait long. And when once she hears that you have confessed and suffered, she will be here, and you will see her tortured before your eyes."

Valerian rose and laid his hand fiercely on Priscus.

"I will not hear of this," he said.

"Then how will you bear to see it?" was the reply.

Valerian fell back on his couch and hid his face.

"For an unmeaning act, for some angry looks from the Bishop! They make the terms marvelously easy. They permit you even now, not to sacrifice, but to purchase a certificate. No public act at all. A little transfer of property, and this very moment you are free, before your wife has heard of your torture. She need know nothing but that you have confessed nobly, suffered, and then been liberated. Otherwise she will be to-morrow as you were yesterday. See, I have the certificate, ready signed; only to be accepted. Not a word. Only to resign a portion of the farm."

"If Clement is gone the farm may well go," Valerian said. And he accepted the certificate, and was free.

Feeble as he was from the torture, he was not disabled, and before the dawn broke he crept out of the prison doors into the cool morning air.

Priscus would have accompanied him to sustain his feeble steps; but he declined the hateful companionship, now more hateful than ever, and crept home alone: free.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME! was it home? Clement had gone home!

Free! was he free? Clement was free!

It was still dark as he went forth from the gate of Carthage.

Alone! that at least was certain; alone for ever; alone everywhere; alone as those two lapsed Christians, from whose touch he had shrunk as from pollution.

He felt it as he passed the portico of one of the temples, from which a noisy band of revellers were coming. Alone in the midst of these; of their company he would never be, nor would they believe it if he could pretend it. He felt it far more as, threading the less known streets, he passed the familiar door of a house where, especially in these late troubled times, the Christian Church had been wont to assemble. Alone there also. Familiar door, but open no more for him. Sacred threshold,

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which he had crossed side by side with Eucharis. Holy table and altar, where he had knelt with her, with Viola and Justa, and with Clement—with Clement, now a crowned victor, for ever out of his sight!

For by a terrible Nemesis it seemed to him that the very act by which he had abandoned Christianity had made Christianity to him the only perfectly sure reality. His denial had smitten his doubts into the nothingness they were. His denial had smitten his wavering faith into conscious substance.

And as, feeble and bruised, shattered in body and soul, he tottered along the walls, up and down the steep of the narrow streets, this great solid Roman Carthage, with its temples and tribunals, its quays and docks, its harbours filled with laden ships, its palaces and paupers, seemed as much a dream as the ancient Punic Carthage that had sat enthroned a millennium before by the same seas, and now lay buried below.

Punic Carthage had vanished like a tale that is told, Roman Carthage and Rome herself were

vanishing like an echo of the old story; all, all was shadowy and unreal, except, only except, the Christ Clement had died confessing and rejoiced in dying, except the Christ he had doubted and denied, except the world of untold joy into which Clement had entered, and the world of untold sorrow to which he had sold himself!

As he approached the city gate it occurred to him he should have difficulty in passing it. With his torn and bespattered clothes, the haggard look he must have, and the feeble and limping gait of the wrenched limbs, he must seem like what he was—an escaped criminal or a dangerous vagabond. And what answer could be given to the questions the Roman guards were sure to put? Falsehood was new to his lips; yet to say the truth was to set his seal to the falsehood which had set him free.

The difficulty was solved for him again by Priscus, who was there before him and spoke a few words to the guard, in virtue of which he was suffered to pass out.

His progress was slow, enfeebled as he was, and before he reached the garden paths along which

Viola had been wont to watch his coming from the point above the sea, the dusk was giving way to dawn.

No slow process with that sudden impetuous southern sun, a giant from the first moment of his appearing, rejoicing to run his course.

In those last minutes of the dusk, all but wearied out, he sat down to rest on a stone by the edge of a wayside well.

Below him stretched the path down into the little valley which was the last but one before he reached the farm. Every stone, every tree and flowery thicket, were familiar and scarcely aroused his attention. The tremulous shining of the sea in the distance, under the touch of dawn, drew his gaze for a moment; then looking down the familiar path and up the slope he saw a light figure advancing.

Old, familiar sacred symbols came to him on the wings of the dawn.

"Joyful light of holy glory,
Immortal holy Jesus Christ."

No more a joyful light to him. But most surely

a light, most surely *the* light, real, substantial, eternal as never he had known before.

Christianity had passed for him from the airy region of thought and imagination and emotion, into the solid land of conscience and will.

He stood on no dream-land now. No twilight of unreal, transitory, exaggerated lights and shadows. It was day. And he had sold himself to night, and stood a black unconcealable blot upon the day, a block of unchangeable ice within the sunlight.

Condemned, shivering, conscience-stricken, for ever in the Presence, once so gracious and pitiful, now one pursuing all-pervading tide of judgment; once a sea of light, now a pursuing lava-tide of fire.

Terrible words of Tertullian's came to him.

Such "sparks" of anguish and outward contempt as he had himself to bear, what were they but "some few missiles and sportive darts from an inestimably vast centre of fire?"

He withdrew his eyes from the intolerable light, and looked languidly down the familiar path, and up the slope, he saw a slight woman's figure still advancing swiftly, and it seemed stealthily, keep-

ing warily in the shadows of wall and stone and tree.

Something in her movements riveted his eyes, and in another minute there was no doubt.

It was Eucharis. She was alone, and crept silently along in the shadows, looking cautiously around her as if she wished to avoid observation.

His first impulse was to rise and exercise his right to care for her; the next to shrink farther into the shade, and never meet her gaze again.

For she was on her way to the prison, to him, to martyrdom, to die for Christ, with him.

The contending impulses whirling through his brain and heart seemed to benumb him into stone. He sat motionless with bowed head and clenched hands, and saw her pass, felt the sweep of her light dress.

She did not look up when she came near; the dusk and the shadow partly hid him; and timidly she hurried by, without recognising him.

Was he then so changed by those few hours of bodily torture, by that night of inward torture?

She had passed. In a minute the swift light steps would take her out of sight and hearing.

She would pass on to the city, to the prison, and find him gone. She would press on to the tribunal, and give herself up, and be tortured and die.

And to save her from this he had given himself up to death and shame eternal!

His limbs seemed to refuse to bear him after her. It was all like some terrible dream. Perhaps his voice was gone; it was all a dream; already he was a haunting voiceless ghost on the immutable shore! "*She* knows me not." Depart from me. I never knew thee. "*She* will never know me; Eucharis; nor Thou!"

And with the anguish came at last a cry of despair, a long deep echoing moan, an exceeding bitter cry.

At the sound Eucharis turned, moved by an instinct of pity.

She turned and looked back.

He stretched out his arms, and almost involuntarily uttered her name.

In a moment she was beside him, at his feet, her head on his bosom folded in his embrace. How feeble the clasp of the poor wrenched arms had become! Yet they held her close.

She looked up steadfastly in his face.

"Love, how they have made thee suffer! Thou hast confessed! my confessor! my martyr! and what miracle has set thee free?" . . .

She bathed his hands with kisses.

"Dear sacred hands, racked and tortured for Thee."

He did not deny it. He had suffered.

But he gave her no kiss. He could not kiss her pure brow with lips that had denied and were forsworn.

And he could not speak.

"What miracle, love? What miracle of mercy in the hearts of the tormentors has set thee free? Ah! they are men, His redeemed men, even they! Thou hast touched and melted their hearts with thy words, with thy patience. They could not find it in their hearts to carry out their cruel work. Thou hast wakened up the Christian soul in the

heathen. The rack and torture-chamber have been more eloquent than thy eloquent speech; the blood they shed has been a font of baptism for those who shed it. I knew some marvel would come for thee. The worst men have such divine possibilities of pity in them, and thou wert sure to touch the worst."

Still he spoke not.

He even withdrew his hands from her kisses. Those hands had accepted the lying certificate. They were no longer worthy to touch her. He spread them over his eyes; a terrible suspicion crossed her for a moment. Had they maimed him and made him speechless—for ever silenced the eloquent tongue? Such things had been done often.

"Valerian!" she cried out in a tone of anguish, "you can speak? Surely I heard thy voice! I heard thee say my name!"

How could he soften it to her. Could he say the truth, that it was for her sake he had done it? That would be bitterest of all to her, that she should have dragged him down.

There was no possibility of softening it to her.

He withdrew his hands from his face, and looked with inexpressive steady eyes into her upturned face.

"Eucharis," he said, "I have set myself free. Not God; I myself. I have accepted a certificate of sacrifice. I have become a Libellaticus. Priscus had obtained it unasked for me, and he told me thou wert coming to denounce thyself and give thyself up to torture and death with me. And I accepted."

She said not a word, she did not shed a tear, but sank down at his feet, crouching low, there on the ground, as if she had been the penitent.

And then, after some minutes' silence, she rose, and standing behind him, gently laid his head on her shoulder, and pressed her hands on the burning brow, and bent over and kissed the quivering eyelids.

"Beloved," she murmured, "my own! you did it for me."

"Thou knowest, O Christ," she moaned, "he

did it for me. Thou knowest that he loves Thee. He did it only for me."

There was no passion in her tone, but the most loyal trust and reverence, as well as the tenderest pity. "Look up at me, at thy own Eucharis!" For a terrible memory came over her of the lapsed husband and wife at the catacombs—the wife who had tempted to betray, and the husband whose eyes had never rested on her since.

"Look up at me. Neither thou nor I have really changed." He did venture to look up in her eyes, and there he met the old look of infinite reverence and trust, blended with a compassion that was half-motherly, half-angelic. And he drew down her hands, bent his head over them, and imprinted one long kiss on them, and hot tears fell fast on them which he did not try to check.

"No more a Divine ideal and leader to thee," he said, "but a poor failing mortal creature, yet dear to thee still!"

"Thyself still," she said. "To be thy highest self, thy best, for ever!"

And when he looked up again the old radiant smile was on her face, and she said—

“I seem to see a false self coiling and twining round the true. Softly gliding and twining with fond, snaky, treacherous wiles. And I seem to see thee, thine own true self, lulled to slumber in its coils, and at last I see it dart out its fangs and sting thee thy true self, to the heart. And thou, thy true self, writhest in mortal anguish, but thou art awake, and knowest the enemy. And,” she added, as if she were chanting an inspired hymn, “I see Him who bruises the serpent’s head coming down to thee, and trampling on this serpent, and setting thee, my own beloved, free; feeble and wounded, my beloved, but free.”

So she believed in him still, altogether, for ever. He knelt before her, humbled, smitten, fallen. But in this humiliation there was the beginning of a sweetness he had never before known, a glimpse of a Divine pity, which, while faithfully humbling to the dust, would never lower or despise; would crush and kill if needful, but only to restore

and make alive, and create anew the true being God had meant to be the likeness of himself.

And she also was learning through him, learning of Christ; for as she knelt beside him and they prayed together, he daring not to utter a word, she appealed, not as was her wont to Him as the good Shepherd; they seemed rather to her to be kneeling together close in the shadow of the Cross, of the crucified, and all she could say was, "O Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the world! 'Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis! Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem!'" and then slowly they crept home together.

But with the first glimmering of hope came a purpose to Valerian—a purpose he distrusted himself almost too much to dare utter, even to Eucharis.

His steps grew more and more tottering and feeble, and but for her he could scarcely have reached the house.

And when they came in sight of the house a rush of memories overpowered him, and the purpose was uttered.

"It is a sacred place," he murmured; "it is Clement's home, Clement's creation. How can I enter there, a traitor? Eucharis, I may die yet, not a dishonour to him, to thee, or the babes. Make me a couch of leaves to-night in some outhouse. Let me not pollute the house with the presence of a traitor—even for a night. And to-morrow I shall be strong enough to walk. Let me creep back to Carthage, and confess, and die!"

"If it is God's will, thou shalt go," she replied, for she had thought of this from the first. "*We* will go, as I had meant, together."

"You think I might dare, I might be accepted yet, and be no dishonour to his name and thine? You think it possible I might yet be permitted and strengthened to do this? If I were at the tribunal now it would, I think, even now, be different. I should confess, not a philosophy, not even the Church, but Him, the Christ himself, and I think He would help me, as he helped Clement. But dost thou think so? He could strengthen me, beloved, even to see thee suffer, if that must be! Alas!

I *have* made thee suffer more than any heathen tormentors ever could."

This she could not deny.

But she persuaded him to come into the house, and be laid in his own chamber.

And then she went and told the sisters, telling them also his purpose to go back on the morrow.

But on the morrow the racked and fevered limbs were powerless to move.

Long days and weeks and months of perilous illness followed; the fountain of life drained to its lowest by anguish of body and mind, and loss of blood, and the consuming fire of fever, the brain wandering wildly.

The dark thoughts that were in the air around him, of marriage being not so much a divinely meant completion of human life as a fall to a lower life, had often clouded even his brightest days. And now that the spirit for the time had lost its balance, and its power of shutting up its struggles within itself, terrible questionings came. Eucharis seemed a terror to him, and yet for both their sakes she would suffer no one to know and share this anguish.

"*She* has not fallen," he would say, "she is an angel of light. Only I. I fell once from what Thou mightest have made me be, and so again, the second fall is easy—easy. But she was no tempter, not to the first nor to the second fall. Satan, that is thy lie! Where two Christians are, Christ is, and thou canst not come. But I am no Christian—no Christian; in that thou sayest truly. And so thou comest. Thou hast power to tempt. She never tempted. She never fell. Only I, twice. She does not know it. She must never know."

Silently she knelt beside him, while he tossed from wave to wave of this tempest; out of sight, when she could, and always praying.

Then, at last, her prayer seemed heard. For gradually that terror seemed to pass away.

And then it seemed that another terrible dialogue went on within the shattered spirit.

Through the hushed and quiet house, through the open windows across the gardens, appalling the slaves at their work, rang in severe, penetrating, commanding tones the words—

"Depart, depart! I never knew you—never, never!"

And then a piercing cry of agonizing entreaty, "Lord Christ, forgive, forgive!" "I knew Thee not. I never knew Thee!"

And then again, stern and clear—

"Depart, depart!"

But then this terror seemed to vanish, and the mind vibrated chiefly between a spasmodic struggle to go back to the tribunal and the torture-chamber, the echo of Clement's last words, "Thou diedst forgiving: forgive and save," and a restless search for some lost persons unnamed, whom, at first, no one could comprehend. "I must find them, even were it in hell!" was the bitter cry. "I must find them, and bring them; no entrance without these. Depart, depart! In that ye did it not to these; in that ye despised these, the least, ye despised Me."

"But where, Lord, where? It is all dark; fire, tumult, yet dark, all dark."

At last it flashed upon Eucharis that it was the lapsed husband and wife for whom his poor bewildered soul was searching, and from that moment it seemed to relieve him greatly that he was not alone, but she with him, in the search.

“We will find them, beloved,” she said in her calm, low voice; “we will surely find them.”

“I must not come without them,” he said, with a wistful bewildered look; “He will have mercy and not sacrifice—mercy, mercy! Without these He will not let me in. No crowns—not crowns of martyrdom will do—nor Clement’s prayers—only these two—only to bring these in our hands. Then, perhaps, He will let us in.”

There were many relapses.

But as the reason came back the longing to find those lost ones did not pass away.

“That was no delusion,” he said. “It was the voice of our Lord; and He means it. We must find them and bring them home.”

This purpose even divided his mind with the resolution to go once more to the tribunal and confess, so deeply had the words been imprinted on his heart, “I will have mercy, and not sacrifice.”

At last the lost strength came back so far that he could creep up the hill to the catacombs, where the little “church of threes,” which Tertullian thought so blessed, still ventured to assemble.

The next expedition was to be to Carthage, to the tribunal, to resign the certificate and accept the penalty. In a few days he would be strong enough for this.

Once more the little broken family went up the shaded path through the vineyards together, Valerian in the garb of penitence, coarse sackcloth, intending to kneel in the nook in the rock outside.

Eucharis knelt there beside him.

She would stay in the dark outside with him. It was her right and her place, she said, and none could deprive her of it.

But when the Holy Eucharist was celebrated, and the separating words were uttered, "Holy things to the holy," and the faithful knelt within to communicate, Valerian touched her and said, "Go, it is His call; thou wilt be nearer me with Him than here outside by my side."

She hesitated a moment, and then went.

She came back with the old radiant smile on her face. And on Valerian's face, also, was a look of peace she had not yet seen.

For in the meantime the two lapsed penitents

he had sought so long had crept up to their old place behind him; he had looked round and perceived them, and silently moving back beside them, close beside those from whose touch he had shrunk as from pollution, he held the thin hand of the man pressed on his heart.

And when Eucharis came to kneel beside them, the three looked up with an expression of new wonder and hope in her face. And her smile embraced them all like a sunbeam, like the wings of an angel.

CHAPTER XIX.

THAT evening, as Valerian and Eucharis sat among the vines on one of the terraces Clement had last finished, the little children playing at their feet, Valerian said—

“To-morrow, then, at last, I go again to Carthage.”

“*We* will go,” she said, laying her hand in his, “if indeed thy strength is restored. I would not ask that we should delay a day.”

“Strength will be given,” he said quietly. “But I must go alone.”

“Thou wilt not distrust me?” she said. “Have I ever weakened thee by look or word? Surely,” she added, raising her clear soft eyes to his, “the old terrible fear is not creeping back over thee? Thou dost not fear I am to be a tempter to thee?”

“Nay,” he said, “given by God that we should

make each other His very best; given to me as His guard and angel abiding with me to lead me on! But, beloved, I am not going to denounce myself—to proclaim myself as one who has a right to seek the martyr's crown. I am going simply to unsay a lie. For thee to offer thyself up with me would be tempting them to do a wrong."

"Is this a sudden thought?" she said.

"I have thought of it for weeks," he replied, "but have not dared to tell thee. And," he added, taking the babes in his arms, "there are these; thine and mine for ever. How dare I suffer these to be bereaved of thee?"

"Nay, I am *thine* first and for ever," she said. "Of that I am sure. Do not seek to bewilder me from this."

"It is true," he answered; "it is true. If God calls thee, it will be; but not to-morrow. See what to-morrow brings to me."

"Dost thou command?" she said.

"I feel sure God would have it thus," he replied. "To obey is better than to sacrifice. He knows, beloved, what a sacrifice this obedience is."

She said no more.

All night she struggled silently with the agony of love - to go with him.

But in the morning she was ready.

As they knelt together alone, perhaps for the last time, she said, "Not our will, but Thine be done." And then, when they rose, she added, "Beloved, thy will is mine. God will have mercy, and not sacrifice. I will not cause any to do wrong. I will stay with thy babes, and with the lapsed ones thou lovest, and one day we will bring them home together."

And so he went forth in the early dusk, alone, but with a buoyancy of heart he had never felt in his brightest days, back to Carthage.

When he was out of sight Eucharis went and told the sisters, and, together all day, the three women had but one thought in their hearts. But neither of them spoke of it.

And neither of them said any words of prayer. They knew not what to ask, and scarcely what to wish. Only, all day long, as they watched the babes

and went about the household work, they were offering that most precious life to God.

The household task was done. In the heat of the noontide Viola was reading in a low voice the last letter from Bishop Cyprian to Justa, resting wearily on the couch.

Eucharis was watching beside the sleeping children, when a step was heard, familiar, and yet sadly changed from the old buoyant tread, heavy and slow.

No one else heard it, and her heart seemed to stand still, and she almost fainted, for she felt if it was Valerian it could be no joyous return; and rapidly she crept out to intercept and meet him, that whatever sad tidings he had to tell he might tell to her alone.

She met him outside the gate.

"I am come back to work for thee and thine," he said, trying to put a cheerfulness into his tone and look.

But she only took his hand, and drew him apart into *their own room*.

"A burden has been laid on thee, my beloved," she said. "Let me share it."

He sat down on the couch, and for the first time in her sight broke down utterly, the vainly repressed sobs convulsing his whole frame.

"They will not accept me. God will not take me," he said. "Thou must bear with me still, disgraced and dishonoured as I am. God may forgive, but the lost steps can never be retraced: the lost moment for confessing Him can never be given back."

Gently she drew the whole story from him.

The officials had treated his retraction quite lightly, as a thing of no importance. At first they had spoken sarcastically, as if they thought Valerian wished to escape paying the fine involved in the certificate.

"Excuse us," they said; "you have duly paid part of the price in the encouragement to your sect to follow your prudent example, which we understand many did; but we cannot spare you the rest, a portion of that excellent farm. Just now the *Government* is more in want of farms to buy soldiers

to fight the Goths with, than of Christians to make examples of. The order for the suppression of the sect for the moment has relaxed. At present we require nothing but the lands."

And when he insisted on giving up the certificate, they at first refused to receive it, and then after a consultation one of them said—

"There are two meanings to this agreement. One, that it is a pledge of your lands being made over to the State. That is irrevocable. The other, that it is a sign of protection to you. That, if you please, you can certainly resign. Yours has been a wisely timed decision. The Emperor Decius is, as, perhaps, you have heard, in Pannonia, on the borders of the empire, sorely pressed by the barbarians. Perhaps even worse. And for the moment we have other things to occupy us besides the scruples of the Christians."

"And so," Valerian said, after concluding this narrative, "I was dismissed. And there is no going back, no recovering the lost ground, no unsaying the evil words, no undoing the base deed for ever."

She looked up in surprise.

yet. This rumour about the Emperor might yet be disproved. And, of course, it is hardly to be expected they should relax as to the estate."

The hot blood rushed to Valerian's face.

"Prudent!" he said. "Do you think I waited till it was prudent? I went at the first moment I had strength. But why should you believe me?" he added, in a changed tone—"why should any one?"

Then, with a new impulse, putting himself aside, he held out his hand to Priscus.

"You meant well by me, I think," he said. "Perhaps, yet, you and I may stand together, not outside, but inside, not in yielding, but confessing."

Priscus hesitated. The generous impulse called out one in him.

"You did confess," he said, "and suffered bravely. And I—I never meant to forsake Christianity in the end. And now that that madman is slain, all will be right again."

Valerian felt unable and unworthy to debate.

And after a pause Priscus resumed.

"I am sorry about the farm. But I know you never had your heart in it as your brother had.

And, in the hands of a friend, it will be much the same, if you will stay."

"In the hands of a friend?" said Valerian, bewildered.

"I felt no one would make such an advantageous arrangement as I could," Priscus replied. "And that money of my uncle's falling in just at the time made everything easy. I cannot be much here. Indeed, I often think of settling in Rome. The manners of the people one meets at Carthage are so provincial. The Christians have no tolerance, and the heathen no cordiality. You can live here as long as you like, and manage it for me, and send me a rent. I should not demand anything exorbitant."

This then was the "furnace" for the present; to live on in the old home, as tenants and servants of Priscus, the betrayer, the Libellaticus, the tempter, and be subject to his commands and his visitations. No burning, fiery furnace set up on the plain in sight of all the people, where the Three Martyrs might walk triumphant in the flames. A common household furnace heated with very common-place fuel, but hot enough to burn out a good deal of dross.

CHAPTER XX.

PATIENTLY, and with a content of heart he could scarcely comprehend, Valerian took up the yoke laid on him, and set himself to make the best of the little fertile world Clement had created, for the new master, taking lessons of the old slaves in details he did not understand. He had agreed to pay a rent in kind, and thus to be rather a tenant than a bailiff. But it was not in the nature of Priscus not to assert his rights of proprietorship in detail. The form and time of paying the rent were frequently changed; fault, not always unjust, was found with the cultivation of certain fields and gardens, as compared with their state in Clement's time, and the weight of inferiority to Priscus and to Clement was made in a thousand ways to press sensibly on Valerian. The best rooms in the house were by degrees reserved for Priscus, and the family lived in those of the servants.

But, in no morbid sense, humiliation had acquired an indescribable sweetness for Valerian. He accepted slights at times almost with gaiety, as if they were hints and tokens that his penitence was not rejected. In some strange manner he felt more in the right way, and more consciously treading a path, less drifting in a pathless wilderness, than ever before.

The footprints of Clement seemed before him; and, now and then, more than footprints of Another Whom he had begun first truly to follow when he seemed to desert; more than silent footprints of a vanished life—a Voice, saying, in each call of humble every-day duty, in every step down towards the lowest place, "Follow Me."

Healthy work of the hands it was to which he was called, the merciful, wholesome toil in the sweat of the brow to which the multitudes are called: the work of liberating nature from her oppressors, which he had once envied Clement, not, however, pursued as by Clement, with the stimulating sense of gathering an inheritance for his beloved, but simply as a day labourer, working for their daily bread.

But to him this was simpler and sweeter; not that he coveted humiliations, but since the destitution of martyrdom had become for him truly the highest place, property had ceased to be a thing to be coveted for him or his. By degrees also, as he began to cease to covet martyrdom as a restoration of his own dishonoured name, the ambitions of love began to displace the ambitions of self. And if at first even these brought suffering, as he felt to what his fall had reduced those he loved, the joy in their patience and cheerfulness, and all the treasures of mutual help poverty brought out in them, made the thankfulness sometimes deeper than the pain. It was given him also to have at their humble table the two lapsed Christians who had been brought so close to his heart; at this table he sat beside them, apart from the family, below the lowest slave, according to the rules prescribed for penitents.

Every day he sat beside them, and knelt beside them as the hymn went up at evening, the three silent voices which as yet dared not take up the Sacred Name in praise, adding depth to the music of all the rest.

Every day he kept the man, Justin, beside him at his work in field and garden, their hands and their eyes meeting in the familiar labours, training, pruning, sowing, reaping, gathering together, till the terrible strained look slowly passed from the worn face, and human glances of recognition replaced the fixed impersonal gaze. Fellow-labourer and fellow-servant at least he had become with other men, and, through these common services, the hope of the reknitting of the deeper ties might dawn at last on the troubled broken heart.

Morning and evening for a moment his face brightened always as he met the smile of Eucharis, the first human glance he had willingly met for years.

She called him always by his name, Justin, not the feigned name he had chosen to give himself, but the true old name the wife had told her; and although at first he had resented this as a betrayal, by a severe glance at his wife, by degrees the familiar syllables in the quiet, glad tones seemed to welcome him like the touch of a mother's hand.

But tender and considerate as Eucharis was to

Justin, her manner to Candida, his wife, had an inexpressible sweetness, a reverence of pity, a patience of undying hope, at times a sisterly gaiety, at times a daughterly attention, that robed and crowned the poor, forlorn, despised one in the sight of all as with bridal or royal robes; yet always unobtrusive and spontaneous, as a thing inevitable and in the natural course of things.

She herself smoothed the masses of hair sorrow had early made silvery, and (in defiance of Tertulian) arranged it around the well-shaped head in plaited coils.

She insisted on adding those tender touches to the coarse penitential dress, which gave to the slight bent form the simple grace belonging to it, turning the marks of time and grief on the worn face and bent figure, from signs of neglect as of something trampled on, to claims for reverence, as on a land hallowed by sacred, fruitful furrows. Yet the eyes of her husband steadily avoided her still; on her his reviving glance of human sympathy and recognition never rested.

Valerian's bearing to her was reverent as a son's,

St. Paul's brief golden code of all chivalrous courtesy towards women being in her case blended with a peculiar tenderness.

But Eucharis could not induce him to plead for her with her husband.

"It would be useless," he said; "and, besides, whatever other duties God laid on him must for a long time to come, he felt, be fulfilled through deeds rather than through words, so worthless had the most eloquent speech become from lips that were forsworn!"

At length, therefore, Eucharis herself took courage, and lingering behind with Justin and Candida as they returned one morning from the church of the catacombs, sending Candida on with a message to Valerian, she walked by Justin, and said to him, in a low grave voice—

"You are beginning to hope you may be forgiven!"

A strange unwonted severity in the gentle voice startled him, and he looked up. The eyes were as grave as the tones.

"You told me to hope!" he said, in a tremulous voice.

"Our Lord has forbidden us not to hope," she said. "But He has also far oftener forbidden us not to forgive."

He glanced at her with a quick flash of interrogation.

"We must forgive all save the tempter," he replied, with a burst of bitterness. "The tempter is the devil; *she* was my temptress."

"What! are we not all children of a temptress?" Eucharis said; "a poor, bewildered, tempted, lapsed wife, who tempted her husband—and was better, nevertheless," she added, with a sudden flash of indignation, "than the husband she tempted. For he was base enough to accuse her to God, which she would never have done. The devil himself is an accuser as well as a tempter. Poor, tempted, forsaken Eve, how did she feel when she heard her husband accusing her to God? Shall I tell you how I think she felt? I think, being but a poor tempted woman, yet to be the mother of all living, God never suffered the fountain of love to be

quenched in her heart, and while Adam was excusing himself and accusing her to God, and accusing God for giving her to him, I think poor Eve was prostrate in the dust of the wilderness at her husband's feet, at the feet of God, in the anguish of her humiliation accusing no one but only herself, and excusing him. And therefore I think, perhaps, in the heart of Eve, and not in his, first sprang up a Divine hope as she embraced her first-born, and welcomed him as 'a man from the Lord,' the man from whose race at last the Son of Man was to be given. But remember," she added, the look of joyful inspiration shining once more in her eyes, "Son of Man because Son of Mary, blessed for ever, blessed above all women. And from blessed Mary's lips came the first response which first reversed the curse. It was the adoring heart and subject will of a woman which, accepting the will of God, began to reverse the curse of Eve. Eve was tempted and fell, and herself tempted, but she never sank so low as to lose love and become an accuser." Then laying for an instant her hand on his, she concluded, "Our Lord may forgive those who having been sorely

tempted, fail and even tempt. But He cannot forgive those who being faithfully loved refuse to love, who being entreated for forgiveness refuse to forgive. Not Bishop Cyprian, not a council of the whole Catholic Church throughout the world, not the dying pleading of martyrs, not the dying lips of the Christ himself, can absolve the heart in which such sin is cherished."

Justin fixed his eyes on her face with a mingled expression of anger, wonder, and awakening hope. And she left him.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was evening, and after the sultry heat of the day the family were once more gathered together at the evening meal—the sisters Viola and Justa at the head of the table, the slaves below them, and apart from all, in the garb of coarse sackcloth, Justin and Candida, with Valerian and Eucharis close to them, when a bent and feeble figure, in coarse raiment, soiled with sordid work and the dust of travel, appeared at the door, leaning like an old man on a thick staff.

No sound escaped the lips; the frank, wide-open blue eyes were fixed with a bewildered, horror-stricken gaze on Valerian. And Valerian was the first who, with a low cry of awe, such as might have greeted a disembodied spirit, uttered his name.

“Clement!” he exclaimed. “Brother” he did not dare to say; but in another moment he was at his brother’s feet and embracing his knees.

Clement threw aside his staff, and, stooping down, threw his arms around his brother's neck and kissed him, and, finding himself unable to raise him, knelt down beside him, locked in a close embrace.

Then rising himself, and resting his hand on Valerian's shoulder, he said—

“What does this garb mean? Who has so wronged thee? He was a confessor; he was tortured to the last point of endurance! I saw him. He fainted. I thought he had died, and that I should never see him again.”

And slowly, as if recounting the deeds of a hero, Clement went over all the humiliations and torments they had inflicted on Valerian, and told of his silent, un murmuring endurance unto what seemed death.

Eucharis knelt beside her husband, the tears streaming over her face as she looked up through them with a radiant smile at Clement.

“I knew how thou hadst endured,” she said, “though thou wouldst never hear me speak of it!”

“Who has so wronged him?” Clement resumed.

"I. None but myself. Who could have so dishonoured me but I myself?" Valerian answered. "I accepted a certificate of sacrifice; I sold thy birth-right for it. Betrayed at once thy Lord, and thee, and all. This home is ours, is thine, no more," he added, in a tone almost of despair, "and all through me."

Then Eucharis spoke to Valerian with a tender severity,

"Hast thou a right to malign thyself before us all?" she said, "and before this blessed one, who loves thee as his life, and to break his heart?" And then she told how Valerian had repented immediately and sought to return, of the long, perilous fever and agony, and of his journey back to Carthage, and resigning the certificate before the persecution closed.

Then a joyful smile came over Clement's face, which seemed to take the weary, care-worn, aged look away. He insisted on raising his brother; and with his arm around him he said, "This is no Libellaticus. I have been in the mines, and they call me a martyr or confessor. But he endured more than

I before he fainted; he has endured more since; and the Church must recognise and honour him. And together we will go to the altar, together to God our exceeding joy."

The whole little company pressed ardently around Clement's feet. "Confessor! martyr!" they cried, kissing his feet, his hands, the hem of his poor travel-stained miner's garments.—

And Valerian murmured, with head bent down and lips pressed on his brother's arm—

"To the altar, if ever, brother, absolved through thee!"

But Clement gently disengaged himself from their passionate, almost adoring homage.

"Brothers, sisters," he said, with a tender austerity, looking down on all, "You humble me in the dust. You make me wish to sink and hide beneath the earth, in the grave, in the mines whose darkness has covered me so long. Who am I, that you so honour me? What but a common soldier that has simply stood in his rank—has been called to do what the whole host would have done if they had

been called?" And laying his hand on Valerian, he added in tremulous tones, "He endured more. What were my sufferings, with my easy, quiet nature, my nerves braced by out-door work, my imagination like a child's unburdened with more than the moment's load, to his? Take a courser from the Arab tents, sensitive, eager, the noblest creature of its kind, and try to make it endure what you inflict on a dull beast of burden. Some can suffer more in one nerve than others in their whole body. The quick imagination can gather the agony of a life into a moment. And," he added, lowering his voice, "the heights must be measured by the depths. Think what he had to lose. Yet I am not defending him, unless against himself. I am only defending myself against your homage. What is a Christian but a sinful creature Christ has redeemed, a feeble creature Christ upholds? What is a 'confessor,' martyr even (and I am no martyr), but simply one who cannot bring his lips to say the Son of God is not what He is. Have you so little faith in Him as not to know He has the making of His martyrs in you all? This is our martyr after all!" he con-

cluded, tenderly laying his arm with a smile on the shoulder of Justa.

Eucharis lifted one of the children, the little Charis, to his arms. But the little one was shy and frightened at the strange, earnest voice and soiled garments, and hid her face on her mother's shoulder, and set up a little moan.

"See," he said, with a smile, "the babes understand better, they know I am but a weary, worn, mortal man. Take me back as the son from the far country; if you will, kill the fatted calf for me, and give me the new robe, and shoes on my feet, for they have had none these many days. But I pray you set me on no cold and lonely pedestal. Take me among you once more as one of yourselves."

And so in a short time, after the bath and the change of raiment, Clement sat among them as of old at the simple meal, and that evening went his old journey of inspection round the farm, observing and directing as of old, so that one of the old slaves shook his head, almost grumbling, in a bewildered way, and said that night to another as he went home from work—

"Is that all the difference it makes to be a martyr? No more change than that? He spoke as sharply about the old horse having a sore on its shoulder, and cared about that branch of the vine being broken for want of support, as if he had not been at the tribunal at all."

"Very strange," was the reply. "And they do say it is all none of his now—all sold to that dainty gentleman from Rome. Yet if he had died under the torture he would have had the crown. What becomes of the crowns when the martyrs do not die?"

But Eucharis heard them, sitting with her children gathering grapes under a thick trellis, as they passed. And she rose and met the old men, and said—

"Do not you see the crown? The holy angels see it. And I think they saw it long before he went to the tribunal."

And as she went down the terraces he had made so carefully, and along the garden he had watered, she sighed bitterly as she said aloud to herself, "None of it his now! None of all this dear world, that he made so fair, ever more his own!"

But little Charis was possessed with the thought of the crown.

"Do you see it, mother?" she asked eagerly. "Is it of gold or of flowers?"

"We shall all see it when our eyes are opened, darling," she said. "Of gold more beautiful than flowers, and flowers more lasting than gold."

The little ones were prattling on together, when Clement joined them, and Charis was quite content now to be enthroned in his arms.

She pressed her small dimpled hands investigatively on his forehead, and looked wonderingly in his eyes.

But all the evening she would not leave him, until she fell asleep with her head on his breast. She did not wake until her mother had taken her from his arms and had gently laid her on her own little bed.

And then suddenly she woke, and sat up and said—

"Mother, I didn't *feel* it either, the crown. Where is the crown?"

"He has laid it at the feet of Jesus, the Good Shepherd," she said.

"I am so glad," she said. "I couldn't lay my cheek close against a crown." And, contentedly, she fell asleep again.

When Eucharis came back she found Valerian and Clement alone in earnest debate.

Clement looked up at her and said, "Sister, if, by being allowed to confess and suffer, I have earned anything from you, it is that you should believe me. You who see the sufferer may, in your generosity, exaggerate the sufferings you do not share into something unlike all the rest of life, and us who suffer into a patrician order apart from the people. What it may be with others I know not. But I do know what this confessing and suffering has been to me. If I was strengthened to take that last step which seemed to you a soaring flight, I know I was only able because it was one of many previous steps. And, perhaps," he added, in a low voice, "not the roughest. Cease to set me apart as a consecrated being, otherwise than as you all are

consecrated. For me, at least, inside this shrine of martyrdom, the exaggeration and the halo did not exist. There, alone in the mines, toiling through the days that were nights, for gains that would never enrich me or mine, I learned some lessons. I learned, beloved, that I had sunk below the true place of a soldier of Christ, the glorious place of the day-labourer, and had been labouring, not gloriously as one with a commission from the King, for Him, but sordidly, as those who know Him not, for the things themselves. I do not exaggerate. It was not entirely so, or the steps would have led the other way, and not, as thank God they did, to the mines. Dear to me was every stone of these rebuilt terraces, every one of these fields and trees and vines; for your sakes, I had thought, for His sake who gave the work, I thought, but too much I know now for their own. I waked to it, first, the night when Priscus told us of the persecution. I dreamt the soulless things were feeding on my dead heart, on me buried and entombed beneath them. And in the mines, once more—nay, as never before—I woke to the glorious joy of being not my own, but alto-

gether redeemed, and doing every stroke of work as a slave, a ransomed willing slave of the crucified King, the Son of God. And every stroke of the pickaxe made music in my heart, as if it had been a note in a Eucharistic hymn. See, beloved, God knew me and taught me; and a pure joy it was to hear those poor old men to-night say I cared as much for the work and looked after it as sharply as if it were still all my own. Not you, brother! God—God has abased me, has raised me thus a little nearer the place He took whose poor garments, given in charity, were gambled for before He died. And, brother,” he continued, laying his hand on Valerian’s shoulder, with a tenderness in his tone which obliged the downcast eyes to lift themselves to him, “brother! in other ways I think our Lord has been teaching thee. We had all set thee on a pinnacle; and ah! beloved, there is no serving and little praying on the pinnacles. And now thou art beside the lowly ones, loving, honouring all, ready to place thyself beneath all. And beside thee, there, I see Him who made himself of no reputation, and, holy and immaculate for ever, was baptized among the publicans and

sinners. Only, by the laws of the Church and the external order which must be reverently obeyed, to thee it is given to show thy penitence and to wear the sackcloth; while to me, though the faithful honour and exalt me with an honour which, for His name's sake who strengthened me, I dare not refuse—to me, beloved, knowing all the while what I was and am, it is only permitted to wear the sackcloth inwardly, wrapped around my soul. But to-morrow," he said rising, "I go to Bishop Cyprian and ask him for thy absolution."

"Never without a public penance," Valerian said in a low voice. "Not even, brother, as the price of thy suffering. Am I wrong? Is this also pride?"

"I think not," Clement said. "I understand. The sackcloth would be welcome to me."

"But thou mayst use thy patrician rights," Valerian added, "for those two lapsed ones; they sacrificed, which men think a deeper fall. Plead for them. For the desire of my heart is, if ever I am permitted to receive the Holy Eucharist again, it may be with them—by their side."

CHAPTER XXII.

DECIUS was slain in battle, perishing with his army on the Pannonian frontier at the hands of the Goths. The persecution ceased for the time, and once more the purged and sifted Church of Carthage was free to meet openly in the city.

Strange separatings and unitings! Since last they met, testings by fire, revealings by fire of what had been or had not been before the fire came to try it.

There was Celerinus, with "the bright evidences of his wounds, his limbs and his sinews worn out with tedious wasting away," grandson and nephew of martyrs, now "the first in this new struggle, the leader of the soldiers of Christ," so that "the title of confessor," as Cyprian said, "was no unfamiliar or novel thing in his race; he simply advanced in the footsteps of his kindred."

And his reward was "to read the precepts and

gospel of the Lord to the Church," so that "the voice which had confessed the Lord might be heard daily in those things which the Lord spoke. There is nothing in which a confessor can do more good to the brethren, than that, while the reading of the gospel he so bravely and faithfully followed is heard from his lips, every one who hears should imitate the faith of the reader."

There was Aurelius, very young, yet twice a confessor, "excellent in dignity and lowly in humility," taking as the highest honour, "after the sublime words which spoke out the witness of Christ, to read the gospel of Christ *whence martyrs are made*," and "since joy is always hasty and gladness can bear no delay," reading on the Lord's Day for Cyprian himself.

There was Numidicus, chosen to be ordained presbyter, "illustrious as he was by the brightest light of confession," his first exhortations having been uttered on the pile among the flames and stones, where he encouraged many to die, his own wife dying at his side, and he himself left for dead, scorched, and bruised, and crushed among the stones

and ashes, whence his daughter, searching for the corpse, had the strange joy of bringing him out alive.

There were numbers of tender, lowly, and faithful ones who pleaded for the pardon of the lapsed. Celerinus, "leader and first," fervently pleaded for his own lapsed sister. For such, Cyprian had words of fervent homage and gratitude.

There were also some whom their confession seemed to have lifted up so that they demanded absolution for the fallen as the price of their own blood. For these Cyprian had fatherly warnings.

Had they not suffered anything rather than sacrifice? and would they have the Church treat sacrificing as if it were nothing?

And corresponding to these among the lapsed were easy and self-excusing consciences, who claimed their pardon, not as the gift to the repentant of the Christ they had denied, but as an indulgence to sin.

To these—germs of more than one separation and real schism from undisciplined pride—Cyprian was austere as our Lord to the Pharisees.

Sin, sin, faithlessness, failing was *the* evil. True forgiveness, which might make the forgiving Lord and the absolving Church of the faithful dearer than ever, he could not refuse to declare. But easy absolution, which might be an indulgence to sin, was poison. No physician, he said, would give the food of the healthy to the sick. "God was not the God—the Church not the Church—of the dead, but of the living."

But for those who were contrite and broken-hearted the Bishop had welcomes, grave indeed and sad, such as truly penitent hearts would desire, but inspiring to new hope and to new possibilities of faithfulness in the future.

He had returned to Carthage.

And his words of mercy, discriminating faithfully between one sin and another, and one repentance and another, fell like healing dew on the broken hearts of Valerian and Candida.

"God did not make death," the Bishop said. "Assuredly He who wills that none should perish chooses that sinners should repent, and by repentance should return again to life. In the Psalms we read

as well the rebuke as the clemency of God, threatening at the same time that He spares, punishing that He may correct, and when He has corrected, preserving.

"The Lord also in His gospel setting forth the love of God the Father, says, 'If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give his good things to them that ask Him.' The Lord is here comparing the Father after the flesh, and the eternal and liberal love of God the Father.

"But whereas the Lord left the ninety-and-nine who were whole, and sought after the one wandering and weary, and himself carried it, when found, upon His shoulders, we, on the contrary, not only do not seek the lapsed, but drive them away when they come to us.

"See! a wounded brother lies stricken by the enemy on the field of battle.

"There, the devil is striving to slay him whom he has wounded; here, Christ is exhorting that he whom He has redeemed may not wholly perish. Whether of the two do we assist? On whose side

do we stand? Whether do we favour the devil that he may destroy, and pass by our prostrate lifeless brother, as in the gospel did the priest and Levite? or rather, as priests of God and Christ, do we imitate what Christ taught and did, and snatch the wounded man from the jaws of the enemy, that we may preserve him healed for God the judge?"

With tender fatherly discrimination he entered into the various temptations which had led to the fall, distinguishing those whose lips no unholy food of sacrifice had touched, whose hands had thrown no incense on false shrines, from those who, advised, perhaps, by false friends among the clergy or laity, had accepted the certificate, and so saved their kindred. And even among those who had sacrificed he recognised many degrees of temptation and of sin.

These distinctions gave no comfort to Valerian, whose whole rest lay in accepting the lowest place. But there, in the depths, Cyprian's strong declarations of "the will of God being life," of "the large and liberal love of the Father," flowed like a fresh baptismal stream over his soul.

Only to Justin the Bishop's words, and the permission for public confession and penitence, and the promise of absolution, seemed to bring no peace.

Still he gnawed his heart apart.

"She tempted me," he said to himself, "and I fell. But for her I might have stood where Clement, where Celerinus, where Aurelius stand."

Yet the words of Eucharis had pierced his conscience, if not his heart.

And on the morning of the day of public penance, as they stood together, he and his wife—she with her masses of silvery hair falling loose and dishevelled around her, as at a funeral, he with shaven head like a criminal, both in sordid sackcloth, sprinkled with dust and ashes—he took her hand, and looking steadfastly in her face, without tenderness, but without anger, he said, calling her for the first time by name, "Candida, my wife, may God forgive thee!"

And she, sinking on the ground at his feet, looked up with streaming, imploring eyes, in his grave, worn face, venturing at last to utter to him the self-accusation which ceaselessly filled her heart.

"Thou wert so strong and brave, and couldst have done so much, and I have made thy life a waste and a ruin! There is forgiveness; but what can give thee back the lost years?"

As she spoke, like a vision from heaven, Eucharis appeared at the door, she also in sackcloth, and with her masses of chestnut hair around her like a veil.

She was withdrawing, but the words of Candida and the agony in her face, and the stony gravity of his, drew her forward in spite of herself, and, standing before him, with her eyes not fixed on him but looking far away—

"Brother! brother!" she said, "there has been ice in thy heart. Take heed that the heart which has so fondly clung to thee be not taken from thee to Him who loves. There has been hell in thy heart. Not she, but the merciful Christ, who knew thee better, kept thee, kept thee through her fond foolish words, from dying what might have seemed the martyr's death. For not for Him wouldst thou have died! Think what it might have been to rise from the stake and the confession, not to His wel-

come and the martyr's crown, but to the blank look of rejection in His face, and the words 'Depart from me, I never knew you,' you who never knew love."

But Candida sobbed, "Ah, lady! lay no fresh burden on him; you did not know him. I did. He might have been a Cyprian but for me."

Then Eucharis knelt down for an instant beside Candida, and pressing the throbbing heart to her breast, and kissing the tearful eyes, she rose and left them once more together.

For some time they neither of them moved.

And then Justin knelt down beside her, and taking her hand laid it on his heart, and said—no more in his hollow impassive voice, but in tremulous broken tones—

"Lord Jesus, we have sinned against Thee and against each other; but I more; longer, and much more."

Then rising, he drew her gently up beside him, and laid the drooping head on his breast and smoothed the silvery tresses, half in benediction, but more with something of the old fondness, and mur-

mured old familiar words of endearment which she had never dreamed she would hear again.

The public confession and penance were comparatively little to those whose bitterest and sweetest confessions had been made long before to each other and to God, and whose penitence was bound for ever in blessed humiliation around their inmost hearts.

Yet were they a solemn seal and consecration, and a recognition of the unity of the Body of Christ—the Church; all sin being sin not only against Him, but against her, against each other; all grace of forgiveness or of faithful suffering being part of the common tide of life flowing from the sacred heart through all the many members, through all the one Body.

Together side by side the three knelt and confessed before all, and before all received with bowed heads the absolution of all the Church through the hands of the Bishop and the clergy.

And beside them knelt Eucharis, though by her husband's command forbidden to wear the penitential garb she had put on, kneeling in her simple

white robe among the penitents, and receiving the benedictory touch from Cyprian's hands.

And together, by his especial sanction, they went afterwards to the altar of God, to God their exceeding joy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE home among the hills continued more peaceful than ever. Candida and Justin remained on the estate, living apart in a cottage trellised with vines. Clement pursued his old work of aiding and liberating nature from her foes, and guiding her to her highest ends; no longer complicated by the peril of being buried beneath the multitude of the things that he possessed, since he worked as a day-labourer for Priscus, whose conscience, quite healed of its little scratches of regret, inclined him to look on himself as a benefactor whose gift of prudence had saved the family of his friends from ruin.

He still regretted, indeed, that Viola would not be induced to take the same view, and he had an uneasy sense that neither the Church to which he was reconciled nor the heathen world quite appreciated his position. But at all events they *appreciated* his farm and his feasts, and in this im-

perfect world, Priscus concluded, one cannot have everything.

There are certain stern and towering virtues, there is a certain exalted and rigid piety, he considered, which no doubt have their value; and the lowly dwellers on the lower levels, without whom the common needs of those lofty souls could not be supplied, must be content with their easier paths and their tamer glories.

With him, then, remained the splendours and the gains and the cares; with them the honours and the heights. Only, sometimes he thought it was, perhaps, rather an uneven distribution of Providence, that not only the lofty joys of religion, but the simple joys of human life, seemed assigned more largely to these exceptional Christians.

There was a gaiety of heart in the impoverished and toiling family, laughter as joyous as that of their children's, a freedom of heart, and it seemed even a capacity for giving, greater than his; for they had received more than one orphan of those martyred in the persecution, and it was clear that the bent and aged man whom Valerian had chosen to

associate in his penitence ("as if a *Sacrificatus* and a *Libellaticus* were to be mentioned in the same breath!") could not earn his salt. Whereas he who had their house and estate found that the servants and the entertainments and the style of living expected of a man in his position quite absorbed his revenues.

Yet, if he had watched as Eucharis had watched, or even Clement, he might have known there was one heart in that happy, tranquil household, which, with all its penitence and humility, and even content—with all its wealth of love and of loving—never lost the longing to be trusted once again and tried, to be given once more something hard to do, something mighty to say for the Church and the Lord.

Great gifts had been given to Valerian; not those external gifts which can be contentedly laid down and which may enrich in being resigned, but interior gifts of heart and mind which can never be laid down, and which eat into the soul when they lie unused—imaginative insight into other

men's hearts, eloquent speech to move men's hearts to their depths, and lift them to their true heights.

He was content, indeed, as long as it should be appointed him, to be silent, to labour with his hands from morning to night; but with him the work of the farm was not as with Clement, work of vocation, and therefore employment of the whole being, but work of endurance, which left the larger half of his nature unemployed.

Therefore to him this toil and silence could only be preparatory. They might last thirty years and prepare for three of ministry; no Christian could murmur at that proportion; they might last all this earthly life and prepare for service in the large enduring world, where they serve day and night. But brief, or long, or life-long, this could be to him only a time of waiting and training.

The end was coming sooner than he thought, though slowly. A terrible shadow of death was sweeping over the shores of Africa. The plague was approaching; in two years it spread from Ethiopia and Egypt, along those thickly peopled and fertile coasts, creeping slowly and steadily on, irresistible and inevitable,

folding its deadly coils round one after another of those prosperous cities which rose within sight of each other, till at last it reached Carthage.

There, like an organized blood-tax, like one of those cruel tributes of young and cherished lives claimed by a victorious foe, it passed systematically from house to house and from street to street, until all the land was foul and dark with it.

Clement and Valerian both watched the slow advancing of the murderous tide, with awe and sympathetic horror, but yet with a strange difference of feeling unconfessed to each other or to themselves: Clement as if it were to be an end, Valerian as if it were to be a beginning, a call through death to higher life.

Into house after house the relentless enemy came with terrible abruptness and swiftness, carrying off rich and poor in the fulness of life. Some fled the houses, and many fled from the city. Some cast their dead and dying out from their houses, "as they could cast out death with the dead."

The streets were strewn with corpses, unburied. The city became an open cemetery.

Then Cyprian appeared at the head and front of the peril.

He had retired from the persecution to a place of refuge near, as a true chief and leader choosing the reality of service to his people rather than the reputation of personal courage. He had been content to be misunderstood by some, and even accused of cowardice; whilst by wise and sober yet burning words he had from his exile encouraged the confessors to suffer, touched the impenitent lapsed with noble shame, and inspired those who despaired after their fall to renewed courage and hope, and while rendering ardent and loyal honour to the martyrs, had restrained the exaggerated homage which would, ultimately, have lowered both the martyrs and the whole Church.

But now that every street of Carthage was a focus of infection, and the true peril was that the Church might abandon her duty, Cyprian was in the midst of his flock again.

He gathered his people together in one place, and implored them not to do as the heathen were doing around them, forgetting all care and duty in

a panic of selfish terror. He reminded them how God loved mercy, and inspired them with noble examples from times of old. Nor would he suffer them to let their mercy be limited to the Christians, to their own people. A glorious opportunity was open to them of recompensing with loving service, at the peril of life, the scourge, the rack, and the stake so lately inflicted on them. They must not be content with cherishing their own people, there was nothing wonderful in that; publicans and sinners would be kind to those who were kind to them. They were called to something more—to love their enemies, as the Lord had done and had commanded them; to practise a clemency which was like that of God, of Him who made His sun to shine on the evil and the good, exhibiting all these kindnesses not to his own only, but to aliens.

“It becomes us,” he said, “to answer to our birth, and it is not fitting that those who are born of God should be degenerate, but rather that the sonship of a good Father should be proved by the emulation of His goodness.”

At once the multitude before him, the Church

of Carthage, from a portion of the broken and panic-stricken crowds around, rose at the Bishop's word, and by his guidance to the sense of their true dignity and place and power, into a great society of beneficence, an organization of mercy in this needy, stricken world.

"The various ministrations," says Cyprian's friend and deacon, Pontius, "were carefully distributed according to the quality of men and their degrees. Many who by the straitness of poverty were unable to manifest the kindness of wealth, manifested more than wealth, making up by their own labour a service dearer than all riches."

Some devoted themselves to the burying of the multitudes of dead, and meantime to the scaring away of the troops of dogs which began to feed on them.

Some distributed bread among the women and children deprived by the pestilence of the bread-winners.

Some gave water and food, and such medicine as they knew of, to those already stricken with the

plague, or soothed the poor dying sufferers, exhausted with fever and loss of blood, and all the loathsome symptoms of the disease.

They did this, knowing well themselves, and warned by Cyprian, that they were armed themselves with no charm against the infection. "Some wondered," he said, "that there was no exemption for the faithful from the ravages of this terrible plague, no distinction between the heathen and the Christian. The distinction, he reminded them, lay *not in exemption from death, but in what death had become to them*, the gate of life and everlasting joy."

And so, with the scars and mutilations of persecution fresh on them, maiming and enfeebling their bodies, these Christians went forth joyfully at the word, and in the steps of the Master, to "do good to those who had entreated them spitefully and persecuted them."

And the Church rose for a time incontrovertibly and visibly to her glorious place as an organization of charity through the world.

The brothers Clement and Valerian came hastily

back from Cyprian's eloquent oration to organize the household at the farm for aid in the work.

Priscus had long since fled, seeing nothing but insanity, moral and mental, in exposing his precious life to this indiscriminating foe. If he wished, he said, Clement might send what he liked to Carthage, reserving a moderate rent for him. The provinces evidently were not the sphere destined for him, and he did not think he should return.

The whole products of the farm, therefore, were at the disposal of the Christian family.

Justa alone remained constantly at the home, to take care of the children, to direct the slaves, and to send off every morning fresh fruit and milk and provisions of all kinds to the city. Viola was to come every morning and evening to bring tidings of what was most needed, and to guide the distribution.

Clement undertook the most perilous office of burying the dead.

After a faint resistance Valerian suffered Eucharis to join him in ministering to the sick and the dying in the city.

Together they commended their children in prayer to God, and then to the arms of Justa and Viola.

Even these precious little ones were not to be exempted from their share in the peril, since Viola and the slaves were necessarily to come and go continually between the house and the infected city.

Alone the husband and wife went forth in the early morning together.

Clement had gone the night before, and Viola was to follow, with Justin and Candida, from their hut, with the provisions.

Once more along the familiar paths among the vineyards and gardens, the fresh breezes from the sea playing around them, the sweet wholesome vines and fragrant shrubs sending up their delicate incense through the dewy air, up and down Clement's familiar terraces, through the shadows of the gently stirring leaves, they walked together.

They paused for a few minutes on the seat by the wayside well, where they had met in that terrible

dawn when Valerian was returning vanquished from the prison.

"It is given us at last," she said, "to encounter peril for Him, for our Lord, together."

He was silent for a minute, and then he said, with a tremulous voice, but with a look of hope and resolution such as she had not yet seen in his face—

"Together now, beloved. But the pestilence is no common scaffold where voluntary martyrs suffer death together and together go to God. Death in the pestilence is lonely as in the home. Are you prepared even for this?"

For he thought of himself as summoned at last, and of her returning, perhaps, alone by those familiar ways.

"I am not ready, beloved, to part from thee," she said. "How can anything make me ready for that but the hand of God? I am content we should be in the hands of God. I cannot say more than that. I cannot look at such a horror; but need I? I can look at Him—at His hand, our Lord's, pierced for us—at His face—is not that enough?"

They knelt together a few minutes in speechless prayer, and then they went on to the stricken city.

A few days afterwards, in the deserted house where they had nursed a plague-stricken mother to recovery, Eucharis and Valerian were alone together once more: she, stricken, on a lowly couch, he kneeling beside her.

The summons to the bitter parting had come, but not for him.

It fell on him as a terrible impossibility, something incredible and contrary to nature, which it would be quite simple and natural that any miracle should be sent to counteract.

This angel of mercy that had risen for them out of the sea, this heavenly creature who had inspired him to hope and other lost souls to love, full of life and joy as a happy child, full of immortal strength and helpfulness, he thought, as the young men in shining raiment at the sepulchre, it was impossible that she could be seized and holden of death, of a common loathsome pestilence like this.

The room must be full of holy succouring angels watching over her, ministering to her even as she lay there.

He had but to wait; he might not see them, but one would surely come and take her by the hand, and death would fall off from her like the chains from Peter, and she would rise and go forth with him!

The angels were there indeed, though he did not see them, and some Divine touch was laid on her burning hands, and death, with the mortal life he had smitten, did fall off from her like a broken fetter.

But never more would she go forth with him.

"Dost thou remember," she said, with interrupted breath, "when we knelt together outside at the catacombs, and thou badst me go up to the altar, 'nearer thee there with Him, thou saidst, than even by thy side?' It was true, beloved, and I am going." And then with a long, wistful gaze upwards, "I am ready. I see Thy face. It is enough." Then one more long, wistful gaze on him, "The babes—this poor world—need thee a little longer. Never be

afraid of loving too much. I am going to Christ; and He is love. Nearer thee, beloved, with Him, nearer thee."

At intervals she tried to speak again, but often the parched lips refused utterance.

Yet once he thought he heard words like "To those who know Him not, to those who never heard——"

And again, "Lord, I have not loved him too much. He has not loved me too much. Love is Thy will, is Thyself. More love—more—to Thee—to all; not less, more love—more of Thee. Go forth, beloved," she would murmur; "do not stay with me; go on with the succour—you will follow me soon."

And then as a refrain recurring often, "Nearer thee, beloved, with Him, nearer thee."

And so she passed away from his sight. And he was called to the sacrifice which was *the* sacrifice to him, which was death, which was the Cross; yet not a terrible wrong and mistake, but the very footsteps in which he had asked to tread.

Together the brothers laid the beloved in a quiet place they found a little out of the city.

And for the first time, as they embraced each other beside her grave, a vision came to Valerian of how Clement had loved her.

"Thy sacrifice," he murmured, "was made long ago. No wonder thou wast ready for martyrdom."

They did not linger by the sacred grave. They raised a cross to mark it, and then resolutely they went back to their post in the stricken city: Clement to lay the dead in the earth consecrated by her lying beneath it; Valerian to succour the sick and minister to the dying.

Alone, and yet he felt not alone. His lips seemed opened, as if the dear silent voice spoke through them; all the old eloquence came back to them, and to many who heard him his words of faith and love were as the priests' feet of old bearing the ark and keeping back the waves, so that they passed the dreaded river as the King's highway, and entered the King's presence as through the Beautiful Gate of the Temple.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE little hut where Justin and Candida had once found a home was empty. The two she had so loved and succoured were summoned from their labours of love in Carthage to trace the same path as Eucharis. The farm had become a home for orphan children and young maidens left destitute by the persecution and the pestilence.

Patiently Valerian went back to the old life without Eucharis, to fulfil her purposes and carry out her life in the old familiar ways, if such were the will of God, alone.

But this was not demanded of him.

The true sacrifice, as so often, was one God only could recognise, but his devoted service in the pestilence was a sacrifice the Church and the Bishop could recognise as an expiation for his failure in confession, and as a claim to ordination.

He was chosen and ordained deacon and pres-

byter. He was called to be much about Cyprian, seeing the gravity and joyousness, strictness and severity, of his rule and life.

Once more it was given to him to speak eloquent words to the listening people, with the weight of a true life to sustain them, and with a faith which left him no doubt what was shadow and what was substance, with a love to Christ which by degrees made it even a joy to think that Eucharis had the joy of being with Him.

Not long after her death, Cyprian had sent a large contribution to Bishop Numidicus to ransom several Christians who had fallen into the hands of the Goths when the Emperor Decius was slain and his army lost.

With this ransom Valerian obtained permission to go among the Goths, to fulfil his old purpose, and the dying wish of Eucharis, to bear the name of Christ among those who had never heard it.

And Clement and the sisters, abiding in their calling and place in the Church, felt nearer him in what they felt to be his true place and calling than if he had remained with them.

After he left the persecution broke out again under the Emperor Valerian, but this time especially directed against the bishops and chiefs of the Church.

Cyprian was as ready now to suffer death at the head of his flock as before to suffer misunderstanding and exile to succour them.

He was arrested in the gardens near the city, which he had once sold for the poor, and which the Church had purchased back for him.

Tranquil and majestic, the officers of justice treated him as a fallen prince, and the multitudes, Christian and heathen, thronged his road to the scaffold as if he had been a sentenced emperor.

"Art thou Thascius Cyprian," the Proconsul asked, "the Bishop of so many impious men? The most sacred Emperor commands thee to sacrifice."

Cyprian answered, "I will not sacrifice."

"Consider well," the Proconsul rejoined.

"Execute your orders," was Cyprian's reply. "The case admits of no consideration."

The orders were clear for the Proconsul and for the Bishop. He was led by the racecourse to finish

his course with joy; the Christians pressed around him with passionate homage for a look or a touch; and in an open field close to Carthage, surrounded by trees which the multitudes climbed to see him die, gentle and fearless and tranquil, he submitted his neck to the axe and was slain,

* * * * *

A century and a quarter passed over the North African Church, and the persecutions of Christianity by the Roman empire were over for ever. Still the Church was militant in the world, and in a chapel by the coast of Carthage, dedicated to St. Cyprian, a Christian mother spent the night in agonies of tears for her son, lost, it seemed, to her and to God.

The greatest Father of the African Church has told it in his Confessions:—

“But why I went hence and went thither thou knowest, O God! yet shewedst it neither to me nor to my mother, who grievously bewailed my journey, and followed me as far as the sea. But I deceived her; holding her by force that she might not either keep me back or go with me, and I feigned that I had a

friend whom I could not leave till he had a fair wind to sail.

“And I lied to my mother, and such a mother! and escaped: for this also hast Thou mercifully forgiven me, preserving me thus full of execrable defilements from the waters of the sea for the water of Thy grace whereby, when I was cleansed, the streams of my mother’s eyes should be dried, with which for me she daily watered the ground. And yet refusing to return without me, I scarcely persuaded her to stay that night in a place hard by our ship, where was an oratory in memory of the Blessed Cyprian. That night I privately departed, but she was left behind in weeping and prayer.

“And what, O Lord! was she with so many tears asking of Thee but that Thou wouldst not suffer me to sail?

“But Thou, in the depth of Thy counsel, and *hearing the main point of her desire, regardedst not what she then asked, that Thou mightest make me what she ever asked.*

“The wind blew and swelled our sails, and withdrew the shore from sight, and she, on the morrow,

was there frantic with sorrow, and with complaints and groans filled Thine ears, Who didst then disregard them; whilst through my desires Thou wert hurrying me to end all desire; and the earthly part of her affection to me was chastened by the allotted scourge of sorrows. For she loved my being with her, as mothers do, but much more than many; and she knew not how great joy Thou wert about to work for her out of my absence. She knew not, therefore did she thus weep and wail, and by this agony there appeared in her the inheritance of Eve, in sorrow seeking what in sorrow she had brought forth. And yet, after accusing my treachery and hard-heartedness, she betook herself again to intercede with Thee for me, she went to her wonted place and I to Rome."

Monica to her desolate home and Augustine to Rome, to Milan, to Ambrose, to his conversion, to Christ, to God, to his bishopric, to his martyrdom in his episcopal city of Hippo, by the Arian Vandals.

A few hundred years more and the whole North

African Church in those flourishing cities by the coast was swept away, trampled to death under the iron pressure of Islam.

Yet still the sweet and sacred names of her three saintly mothers—the two young martyr-mothers Perpetua and Felicitas, and Monica, pure and fervent type of self-sacrificing mother's love—for ever perfume the whole Church of God as with the ointment very precious from the broken alabaster vase.

And still from the three eloquent voices of her three great men and fathers, Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine, "the echoes roll from soul to soul," the living inspiration breathes from heart to heart, in lands and languages they never dreamt of, from age to age, throughout the Church of Him for whom they lived and died. For, as Tertullian said, "*this community will be undying.*"

THE END.











